

**PROPHETIC PREACHING AS A
MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL
GROWTH**

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**A FINAL PROJECT DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
DECEMBER, 2010**

**UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project Dissertation**

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ABSTRACT

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This project's purpose is to study preaching and teaching methods inherent in the ministry of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond that promote spiritual growth and development. The goal of the project was to develop a model that revealed a response to the word of God, as taught and preached. The project utilized qualitative and quantitative research methods over a six-week period. Sermons, bible studies and bulletin education were utilized to measure this growth. Results indicated slow, gradual change in spiritual growth and development in the various areas. Complete implementation of this plan requires more time to observe behaviors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with much gratitude that I give thanks and praise to almighty God for this wonderful accomplishment in my life. For this journey could certainly not have been accomplished without the undergirding of the power of the Holy Spirit.

To my confidant, best friend, accountability partner, who is resting with God, my late husband, John Oliver Green, Jr., thank you. I pray God allows you to peek over the balconies of heaven to witness this wonderful thing we have accomplished together. The memory of our wonderful life together is etched in my heart. I miss you, but I press forward to the mark of the high calling in Jesus Christ. I am who I am because God blessed you to be such a staying and supportive force in my life. When things get tough, God grants me not only His wind, but simply wonderful breezes of love which so remind me of our life together. I still remember so much that you taught me. You have tattooed your spirit on my heart! Truly you were the wind beneath my wings.

To my family, especially my mother, Carnetta Holmes Ivey, Rusty, Joni, Karen, Wayne and Steve, “somehow I made it.” I love you all more than words can express. I could not have chosen a better family. Thanks for the days you have cried with me, cared for me, and stood with me. It is good God chooses family for you because I could not have chosen better. To Pewee, the rest of the crew, and “the kids,” I love you all!

To my other family, some call you in-laws, but you are the “real McCoy”, my family indeed. I could not have chosen a better family in which to marry. Thank you

Mom Roe. You have poured much into my life and been so supportive. Velma, God couldn't have chosen a better sister for me. We are truly like blood relatives. You both are the best! Dad when you see me, you see John! He's with us all! Surely we have come this far by faith. Thanks for all you do for me allowing me to be a loved and continued presence in the Green family.

To Dr. Ricky Woods and Dr. Terry Thomas, my mentors, thank you for your patience at what was a very difficult time in my life. This has truly been a spiritual journey! Thank you for all of the times I wanted to give up because my grief was so heavy, but that you encouraged me to press forward. Thank you for messages and deeds of hope that reminded me that God had not forgotten me. To the UTS family, especially my peer group, thank you. I could not have done this without your love and compassion. To Christal, my peer associate and to all of my co-horts, your prayers, encouragement, calls, cards and support have kept me going. Thank you for encouraging me to stay the course.

To Pastor Dwight C. Jones, the staff and my entire church family at the First Baptist Church of South Richmond, thank you for giving me the time to pursue this degree. Pastor Jones, thank you for days off, tears on the pulpit and in the office, and days when life didn't make sense but you allowed me the time and space to get through this journey. You showed love even when I had nothing to give and there appeared to be no sight of restoration. Thank you for your trust in God and me, and that things would get better. Your encouragement, constant messages of hope and deeds of love have been such a blessing. The Word delivered by you, Rev. Derik, and the rest of the team was so healing. Thank you for allowing me to practice ministry among you.

To my ministry teammates at First Baptist, thank you for just being there.

Thank you for days when walking into my office moved from ministry to the congregation to ministry to me. You have helped me in ways that you will never know.

To Edna, thank you for the many years you have volunteered to aide me in ministry, no compensation, just a great love for God, and a great love for me. You have mastered what it means to humble oneself that God might get the glory from one's life. To Connie, thank you for taking such good care of me. I don't need to list the many things you have done to make life easy, but you have been a blessing. To my best friend Carolyn, "my other sister," thank you for days and nights of prayer, patience, love and words of hope! You have planted so many seeds in my life. I read a card which reflects our binding relationship. It simply stated that God fixes it such that when I am down you are up and when you are down I am up. God's timing is so perfect! Hallelujah and Praise be unto God that He has us in different places at different times that we might minister to one another. To my newest friend and "seer" thank you for prayers, calls, encouragement, random acts of kindness and all you have done to make this project a reality. To Garry and Chandra, thank you for the spare room and so much love. To my editor, Maya, we were challenged on every hand, but thank God we made it. You are the best. To all of my friends, you know who you are, thank you, thank you, thank you. For every care package, handkerchief to wipe away the tears, movie tickets, grass cuts, house painting, spa days, trips, house cleaning, cry parties...thank you! You have made what seemed so difficult, so much easier to bear! I could not have chosen better friends. God bless you!

DEDICATION

To my husband John, the true wind beneath my wings, who sacrificed so much that I might be the woman God created me to be in this world. You fought with dignity and grace your battle with Lymphoma and gained a glorious home in Heaven. Thank you for holding me accountable, waking me up in the wee hours when I fell asleep typing at the computer, and for teaching me how to “number my days.” To my parents, Willie and Carnetta Ivey, who taught me the value of reading -- an opening to the windows of the world, and the blessing and joy of loving greatly and giving unselfishly, I thank God that he chose you to bring me into this world. To my sisters and brothers, Rusty, Joni Karen, Wayne and Steve (and to you Cynthia as you rest in the arms of God), and Aunt Frances, you have through life taught me the true meaning of family and team. Remember to always “stick to together.” To Grandma Zea, who taught me the true strength of a woman, thank you for teaching me such great wisdom. To each of you, I dedicate this project.

INTRODUCTION

The First Baptist Church of South Richmond, 188 years old, has always served as a leader in the community and has been known for great preaching. This is confirmed in the fact that since the Civil War, the church has had only five pastors, whose tenure averages 50 years. Throughout these years, the church witnessed tremendous growth as evidenced by the moving of its worship site three times during this period. The church has always been at the forefront of social justice, service to the community and new ministry ideas and has provided a testimony of the benefits of taking risks to advance the Kingdom of God.

Throughout its history, the church has been challenged by a decrease in visitors, but almost always, the leader was willing to look at new and cutting edge models of ministry to move the church forward. While the church has grown tremendously under the direction of its current leadership (a membership of 500 to almost 3,000 today), it is facing an era in which so much vies for the time, ears and energy of the congregation. Church membership continues to grow, however attendance at worship and ministry opportunities outside of Sunday morning, seems to be impacted by what can be described as the many “voices” vying for the attention of the congregation. More specifically, these voices are time, technology – streaming services, televangelism, “sermon-lite (feel good sermons),” and sports events for children. What is beginning to occur is the emergence of a congregation that wants to hear a “feel good” message on Sunday morning and be

excused from the responsibility of sustaining a meaningful relationship with God through mid-week study, ministry opportunities, sermons and other study opportunities which encourage transformation.

A visit to the church on any given Sunday morning paints a picture of a vibrant worship service and a spiritually mature congregation. The church holds three worship services on Sunday morning — two at its inner city location in Richmond, Virginia (Hull Street) and one in its county location (Ironbridge) currently held at a local high school in Chesterfield, Virginia. Each of the three services has grown tremendously over the past several years. However, study opportunities and services outside of Sunday worship don't reflect the size of the congregation and paint a very different picture. While, we enjoy a "full house" on Sunday, our additional study opportunities portray a very different congregation. Although the church continues to grow numerically, there is concern that the spiritual growth and development of the congregation is not consistent with this numerical growth.

This writer believes the church enjoys and is the beneficiary of great preaching delivered each Sunday morning by its Pastors. However, it seems that congregational transformation is slow. While this writer believes that prophetic preaching is occurring regularly in the life of the congregation, response to this preaching is not reflected fully in the life of the congregants.

This project allowed the writer to examine the effects of engaging the congregation in a systematic approach to preaching, teaching and bulletin education to determine if there was increased participation in bible studies, ministry activities and giving. The candidate attempted to answer the following questions in this project:

1. How is prophetic preaching defined at First Baptist Church of South Richmond?
Does the congregation hear the voice of God through the preacher? Who is being impacted and why?
2. How can the congregation translate the shout on Sunday morning to substance during the week, i.e., how does this translate into spiritual growth and development?
3. As a result of the model implemented, would spiritual growth be reflected through attendance at mid-week and other bible study opportunities?
4. When sermons are delivered, what is necessary to ignite a measurable response from the listeners?

This writer believed that the answers to these questions would be discovered in the context by using a variety of methods to determine the effect of prophetic preaching in the life of the congregation.

Chapter one will provide an overview of the candidate and the context. It will describe the writer's passion and quest to take on this project.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature which focuses on prophetic preaching and how it has almost always been defined as a divine word from God delivered by man and evidenced by a transformed people.

Chapter three will provide historical and biblical foundations that support the power of prophetic preaching and teaching.

Chapter four provides a description of the qualitative and quantitative resources used to answer the question of this project, does a system of prophetic preaching coupled

with a bible study and bulletin education, yield a prophetic people, thereby creating prophetic community?

Chapter five describes the field experience and outlines the process of the researcher to test the hypothesis. It also details the findings of the researcher.

Chapter six provides a summary of the project and outlines possible additional studies.

CHAPTER ONE

PROPHETIC PREACHING AS A MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Preaching has long been the hallmark of the church. Preaching as expressed through the prophet has historically yielded a response from God's people serving as a catalyst to higher levels in the spiritual journey of the hearer. Yet one must wonder if a response to the word of God, or lack thereof, has more to do with the prophet or other challenges facing the hearer's of God's word today. This writer defines spiritual growth as the divine word from God delivered by man and evidenced by a transformed people. In other words, prophetic preaching is simply that which speaks life into the believer and is manifested as a changed and transformed personhood such that the hearer feels compelled to express a meaningful response to God's words. When the prophetic voice of God is heard, lives are changed and some measurable change is evident in God's people.

It is this writer's hypothesis that the voice of the prophet is often not seen as the voice of God, rather as microphone and not the messenger. This statement captures so clearly the challenge this writer believes is facing the people of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond, Richmond, Virginia. This writer senses an urgency to move God's people towards a return to the voice of God as delivered by the messenger of God.

The church has clearly been the beneficiary of great preaching and teaching. Preaching has been a trademark of the ministry of the church and it has been known for

developing great preachers. In addition, the message of serving community and social justice has been a mantra of this congregation, breathing life into the greater community. This is evidenced in the ministry of the church and the many community projects and social justice issues in which the church has served as a leading voice. The First Baptist Church has historically been viewed as a leader in the community and has enjoyed continued growth and stable leadership. Much of this growth can be attributed to the outstanding preaching which is characteristic of the church. Yet, the challenge the church faces is how to effectively utilize the prophetic preaching model such that the listeners are motivated to respond in a way that yields a spiritually mature people, thereby creating a prophetic community. It is this writer's position, that the church is challenged by the many voices (technology, options, prosperity, no clear allegiance to Sunday as Sabbath) vying for the ear of the listener, resulting in the diminished voice of the prophet. As such, this community of faith hears the word, but the response witnessed has often been one that reflects a people who may possibly be tuned to other voices which turn their focus away from the prophetic voice of God as delivered through the preacher.

Marvin McMickle suggests that prophetic preaching is absent from the scene because too many of those whose responsibility it is to raise the issues have become distracted and preoccupied with other aspects of ministry. It is McMickle's posture that prophetic preaching calls us back to our original purpose of God. He believes we must return to the ways of God.¹ It is this prophetic voice that this writer believes will serve as a catalyst for the spiritual growth and development of the believer. As McMickle

¹ Marvin A. McMickle, *Where Have All The Prophets Gone?* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 9.

believes, there must be a return to the preaching in which God is central and not man. It is the experience of this writer that many have focused more on the messenger and less on the message. David Reid in *What are They Saying about Prophets* suggests that the impact of social and historical realities reveals a perception of the prophet as a public person if not also an international person.² This shift, he believes can be traced to the shifts in models used to describe the prophet.

The Candidate and the Context

This writer was born and raised in the city of Newport News, Virginia located about 60 miles east of Richmond. Growing up in family of seven, the writer learned early on the importance of family, sharing, having a strong work ethic and what it means to be actively engaged in one's community. A product of the 50s and 60s era, the writer understands what it means to be in a segregated environment and quickly learned what it meant to be a part of an integrated environment as part of the first class of students bused during the desegregation era. As such, the writer is well acquainted with the joys and pains of being different, thriving under minority circumstances, and realizes that growing up in this era has strongly impacted the writer's ministry and mission today. As well, growing up in a poor environment, has given the writer a compassionate heart in ministry and a desire to help others move to greater and deeper spiritual lives.

The writer is the product of a family where both parents were present and education was stressed. Although neither of the writer's parents were college graduates, the importance of education was stressed. In particular, the writer's father stressed education

² David C. Reid, *What Are They Saying About Prophets?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 87.

as he was forced to leave the school system to run the family farm when his father took ill and died suddenly. This crippled the writer's father, but gave him a zest for reading, studying and learning which was passed on to the writer and each of the writer's siblings. The writer's mother attended nursing school. Each of the writer's siblings has received college degrees and is extremely engaged and involved in community and church activities. The writer believes that this was due to a requirement established by her parents that one be involved in community activities: Daises, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts or Boys' Club,, and of course church activities. These organizations developed a sense of community and a level of social skills characteristic of the writer's family today.

The writer cannot cite fully all of things that have brought her to this place in the ministry, but cites the early childhood years in which attending church, Sunday school and being engaged in community was strongly stressed in the family. Although raised and nurtured in the church, the writer did not accept Jesus as personal savior until age 23. The writer clearly remembers the words of her mother that the decision was personal and that believed because of the upbringing each of her children would make that decision to give their lives to Christ. So this writer comes to this project with a strong sense of who God is and what this means for her own personal life.

As a young child, this writer always had a love for God's people and according to her mother, reached out to others wherever she found herself. In other words, this writer always made friends and connected with people from a very young age. Growing up in a household of seven also meant that everything was shared, hence the writer, in her lifetime has developed a gift of giving and sharing and desiring more for those around her.

The writer has been a member of First Baptist Church of South Richmond for just over 26 years. As a result of having come up in the ranks of the church, the writer has witnessed and experienced first-hand, some of the challenges and joys of developing the congregation spiritually. As a member of the Deacon's Ministry, the writer was actively engaged in Christian Education and the ministry of service to the congregation. This provided excellent opportunities to work with ministry leaders and to provide guidance to those seeking closer walks with God.

In June of 1998, the writer was licensed to preach and knew in her spirit that after almost 19 years in the corporate world she would be leaving to pursue full-time ministry. This night began an accelerated journey in the ministry life. Two weeks following the licensure service, the writer was offered a full-time position with the First Baptist Church. After much prayer, the writer, in obedience to God, agreed to become part of the staff on a part-time basis with the belief that God would work her concerns about the more than 50% pay cut required to take the full-time position. In August of 1998, the writer was hired as the Minister of Discipleship and began in a part-time position. Thus began an unbelievable journey. In March of 2000, the writer moved to full-time employment and has never looked back. God has supplied every need. As Minister of Discipleship the writer was responsible for the Spiritual Growth and development of the congregation assigned the responsibility of implementing the *Purpose-Driven Church* model in the church. Under the writer's leadership, a core group of 300 was developed which strengthened the church and served as a catalyst for spiritual growth. The journey for this writer has been unbelievable. Today, the writer serves as the Executive Minister of Ministries. In this role the writer oversees all ministries and is tasked with providing

leadership to move the ministry operation of the church to operating at its potential. Directly responsible for the Music and Arts Ministry, the Christian Education Ministry as well as each of the basic ministries of the church, the writer has the responsibility of keeping the well-oiled machine running and increasing in value as a part of the ministry of the First Baptist Church. Under this writer's leadership, the Spiritual Development Institute – the educational arm of the church, was developed and is operational. In addition, the number of ministries has increased from sixty to eighty-five. Clear guidelines for seeding ministries have been established and every ministry seeded has the responsibility of aligning its mission and goals with the purpose driven model. This small change in the way ministries are seeded has yielded a more structured ministry implementation plan, as well as a flexible ministry model that empowers ministry leaders to provide the guidance necessary to help minister to a large congregation.

The writer has always had a passion to aide God's people in spiritual growth and development. While the writer cannot prove that the brownies, girl scouts and church activities impacted this passion for God's people and more importantly the spiritual growth and development of God's people, the writer believes that her ministry has been impacted greatly as a result of engagement in these services organizations.

The writer has seen her role as one in which ultimate goal is to provide the backbone and structure that sustains a vibrant ministry in the church. Luke 4:18 was one of the writer's call scriptures speaks to this writer's ministry assignment and is used as a core value:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.³

In these words, this writer hears and is drawn to the prophetic words of Jesus as he quotes the Isaiah 61:1 text. Reflected are words that speak life and hope to the hearer. In this passage, the writer believes is a portrait of the prophetic and liberating mission of Jesus and all those called to minister to a darkened world. It sums up this writer's passion and call and speaks to the very need of this project for not only the First Baptist Church of South Richmond, but all who seek to develop God's people.

The Church

The First Baptist Church of South Richmond enjoys a rich history and is blessed to have ministered in the Manchester/Blackwell community for almost 189 years. The church has for many years been known for great preaching, teaching and for its strong music ministry. It has always been considered a leader in the community and has been blessed to be able to take pride in a history of being community-focused, socially progressive and socially active. The church had typically described itself as being 1) An Old Church with a New Vision 2) Theologically Anchored and 3) Socially Responsible. This statement clearly reflects the character and basic mission of the ministry at First Baptist and what one may consider a prophetic vision for ministry. The church has kept the same basic theological grounding, but continues to refresh its focus to meet the continuing demands of serving 1) A diverse population in age; 2) a growing move

³ Luke 4:18.

towards technology as a necessary and viable tool for ministry; 3) a strong multi-staff model; and 4) a need to utilize a more current evangelistic model.

First Baptist Church is located in the heart of the city of Richmond, Virginia. The Church has primarily focused on inner city ministry; however, it now holds a service on Sunday mornings in the County of Chesterfield, Virginia. The city is surrounded by several counties: Chesterfield, Henrico, Hanover and Powhatan counties. Richmond is the capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia and is often called the capital of the south. It is a city rich in history which is evidenced by its many museums and the monuments. An independent city, surrounded by several counties, Richmond is located in a metropolitan area. Richmond borders Chesterfield, Henrico and Hanover counties and is located in central Virginia.

The city itself has an estimated population of 202,000, with an estimated population of 1,212,977 for the Richmond Metropolitan Area. This makes the Richmond Metropolitan community the third largest in Virginia. Almost sixty percent of the population in the city is African American, thirty-eight percent Caucasian.⁴ The city is experiencing rapid growth in the Hispanic and Asian community. In fact over the past 5-10 years, the Blackwell community has had an influx of Hispanics. This writer believes that as the Hispanic community grows, the church will need to adjust its ministry to meet the needs of a more diverse congregation. Surrounded by three major highways, Interstate 95, Interstate 64 and Interstate 295, the church is easily accessible and is positioned in a prime location just off of Interstate 95 to provide ministry to most surrounding communities. As part of its expanded vision, the church has purchased acreage in

⁴ Greater Richmond Partnership, "Population," GRPVA.com, http://intranet.grpva.com/intranet/WEB2002/Populationx_r.asp (accessed July 17, 2010).

Chesterfield County to continue its outreach and find innovative ways to reach the greater Richmond Community.

Under the leadership of Dr. Dwight C. Jones, Senior Pastor, the church under his leadership for 37 years, has realized tremendous growth. It has moved from one service to three services; from two staff persons to five full-time ministers, a minister of music and four additional support staff members. In addition, the church has on staff seven part-time music ministry staff members.

The church enjoys a strong partnership between its Pastors and the diaconate which allows for a strong lay-driven ministry model. The Deacons serve as an extension of the Pastor and provide for the congregation a shared ministry model which has proven very successful. In recent years the Pastor has experienced strong diaconate support which has enabled to the Pastor's vision of the church to move forward. This is evident in the congregation's continued willingness to embrace the leadership provided by the Pastor's Cabinet, which is comprised of the officers of each ministry. According to a quote used by Michael Slaughter in *Out on the Edge*:

"A core characteristic of the twenty-first century church is the mobilization of laity. In 21s Century churches, there is a high value placed on mobilization with each person seen as having a gift, role and place to serve. There is a systematic approach to the process of identifying gifts and talents, equipping/coaching and placement for service and mobilization is implemented by a leadership team with a designated point person for lay mobilization."⁵

In 1998, the church began a transition to the Purpose-Driven Church ministry model. Under this model, the church became more purposeful in its mission and did not consider any new ministry unless it could successfully adapt to it purpose driven

⁵ Michael Slaughter, *Out on the Edge* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 112.

guidelines of the five principles of a purpose-driven church: Discipleship, Evangelism, Worship, Fellowship and Ministry.

Under this model, First Baptist Church of South Richmond moved to a servant-driven ministry model which enabled it to develop 300 core leaders who aided in moving the church to its next level. The Purpose-Driven model allowed the church to recapture the mission of the New Testament church as outlined in Acts 2:42-47. The first Christians fellowshiped, edified each other, worshiped, ministered, and evangelized. Also, in verse 47 it is recorded, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” First the Lord added the growth (his part) when the church did its part (fulfilled the five purposes).⁶

This model continues to serve at the very core of everything the church does. As Warren teaches, church growth is a result of church health and only occurs when the message is biblical and the mission is balanced. It was only when the church became intentional about its works and direction, that it realized wave of growth. The initial group of 300 has now grown to a population of about 500 members who have invested faithfully and spiritually in the ministry. This core group of the membership serves as the catalyst for which all major ministry objectives occur. When a major ministry task is to be accomplished, it is most often shared with this group first, enabling the leadership team to promote the vision and plans in the respective ministries.

The church in 2009 selected a theme of being a G.R.E.A.T. Church™, Growing in stewardship, **R**eaching Souls for Christ, **E**xcellent in Ministry; **A**uthentic in Worship and **T**eam in Spirit. This updated vision has translated in to renewed energy and has

⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 49.

focused the congregation on its passion and mission to evangelize in more creative ways through its second ministry site in the county of Chesterfield, Virginia (near Richmond City).

The church does continue to grow. The First Baptist Church has invested resources and provided leadership and engaged in partnership to aid in rebuilding the community. The church, through its Imani Community Development Corporation, in 2006, developed 68 Apartments and 23,000 square feet of retail and commercial space on Hull Street, a major thoroughfare in the city. In addition, the church has partnered with medical personnel to open, the Imani Wellness Center, which provides medical services to the community. The church has also developed in a third block in the community which houses the Imani Intergenerational Banquet Facility, Senior Adult Daycare Center, Daycare Center and the Agape House which houses its Daily Bread Food Pantry Ministry and Basic Blessings Clothing Ministry. It is clear that the church has a vested interest in the community and a passion for social change. This type of ministry is a continuation of the services the church has been able to provide under the leadership of several great pastors.

The Leadership

According to Dr. LaVerne Byrd Smith, Church Historian, in *Traveling On, First Baptist South Richmond, The 133 Year Journey After the Civil War (1865 - 1998), Volume II*, the church has enjoyed the administrations of four pastors whose combined service spanned 134 years (now 143 years): Rev. Richard Wells (5 Years), Dr. Anthony Binga (47 Years), Dr. W.L. Ransome (53 Years), and Dr. Dwight C. Jones, its current

pastor, (36 years).⁷ Since the end of the Civil War the congregation has had the privilege of stable leadership. Each of these leaders brought their unique leadership style and theology. Yet their contributions to the ministry are still felt, even today. This longevity of pastorates is rare and unique to this church. Another unique feature of the history of the church is the longevity in service of its Pastors. Three of the four have served a combined total of 143 years of service. Dr. Binga, Dr. Ransome and Dr. Jones were all sons of ministers and enjoyed a multi-generational heritage in the ministry and the Baptist faith. Dr. Smith also notes several commonalties which existed among the leadership:⁸

- Each pastor enjoyed a fiercely loyal group of supporters and, as in most leadership roles, has experienced some dissent from parishioners on various issues.
- A strong music ministry has been supported by each of these pastors.
- Each had an interest in building and is descendants of persons who have founded or built churches.
- Each responded in meaningful ways to the social, political and spiritual needs of his people during the respective periods of service.
- Each has been featured frequently in the media of his time.
- Each pastor had been intricately involved in education, serving in positions as founder of a private school, coordinator of “colored” schools, principal, college professor, Chairman of the School Board.

⁷ Laverne Byrd Smith, *Traveling on: First Baptist South Richmond, The 133 Year Journey After the Civil War, Volume II* (Richmond, VA: Heritage Preservation Commission, 1999), ii.

⁸ Ibid, xviii-xix.

- Each was intricately involved in the political process, either as an appointed official, a challenger of the system, founder of a civil rights organization, candidate for state and local offices.

The church in recent months has moved to a dual pastorate model, where Dr. Dwight C. Jones, the current Senior Pastor, serves the Mayor of the City of Richmond, Virginia after having served 15 years as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates. The Church elected Rev. Derik Jones as its Pastor in June of 2009, overseeing the day to day operations of the church. It is interesting to note here that the church has always been willing to support the political aspirations of the Pastor, viewing this type of service as an extension of ministry. This interesting dynamic presses the writer even more to explore avenues of spiritual growth and development of the members of the context. Dr. Dwight Jones is a visionary leader and after hearing the voice of God, has been willing to take risks, explore uncharted ministry models, moving forward in faith to advance the ministry of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond.

The Current Ministry

The First Baptist Church currently holds three worship services on Sunday morning. Two services are held at its current location in the heart of the Blackwell community at 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. and a new worship service in Chesterfield County, at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings. This transition to a third worship service in the county area came about as the need arose to evangelize more. Baptisms and persons visiting the church had declined, yet the church maintained its vibrant worship service, strong educational program and a very strong commitment to community and social

justice. The church had initially chosen to remain and build a new church facility in the Blackwell Community. However, after a vision from the Lord, Pastor Dwight Jones sent the staff on a fact-finding mission about its membership's demographics in the year 2005.

What the staff discovered in this fact-finding mission was eye-opening:

- 75% of its membership lived in the Chesterfield County Community.
- Only 3% of our membership lived within walking distance of the church.
- The remaining 22% lived elsewhere in the Richmond Community.
- 70% of our membership fell within the young adult and baby boomer age group.
- While a strong senior population made up part of the congregation, we were ministering to a new group of “visual congregants.”
- Over the next 10-15 years, Chesterfield County had plans for major housing developments. Tens of thousands of homes would be built.
- In the corridor in which our congregants traveled to get to church, there was not a ministry such as the First Baptist Church of South Richmond, providing meaningful and progressive spiritual growth and development opportunities to the Chesterfield community.

The church is structured such that the Senior Pastor, supported by the ministerial team works in conjunction with the Deacon's Ministry to meet the spiritual needs of the congregation. The staff, in addition to its Senior Pastor, currently consists of four full-time ministers: Pastor, Executive Minister Business, Executive Minister Ministries, Minister of Congregational Care and Special Projects. In addition, the church employs a full-time Minister of Music. The staff is assisted by a group of 12 associates who are

assigned to various ministry responsibilities in the church. Ideally, the staff serves as the advisors and the ministry is to be lay-driven. This ministry model was introduced to the church in the year 2001. The church in the past few years has grown to the place where one can see the ministry moving fully into the lay-driven arena. The church began this shift back in 2000 and has continued to see growth as a result of seeking to develop lay leaders. The model used for this transition, *The Purpose Driven Church*, by Rick Warren, has been transformational in the ministry of First Baptist Church.⁹ Since implementing this purpose-driven model, the church has continued to grow spiritually and numerically.

The church faces a unique challenge of ministering through its preaching and teaching to a very traditional congregation who finds itself in a changing environment as Generation X and Y infuse the ranks of the fellowship. While this is a wonderful picture of church, it poses a unique challenge of providing a menu of ministry that speaks to the needs of the entire community.

While God has allowed the church to experience many successes, they have not come without risk and without failure. The church has a resilient spirit and its current pastor of 36 years, continues to motivate and allow the church to know that failures serve as a springboard to strength. It is only when we are not willing to take risks that we diminish God's ability to pick us up, dust us off and reveal to us a better way. As a ministry, the church continues to deal with historic baggage. A few elements of the old "First Church" still remain and there is every now and then a tendency for a very small minority to go backward rather than to move forward. This was best expressed as the church voted a few years ago to become *Two Ministries, One Heartbeat – One Church in*

⁹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

Two Locations®, adding an additional worship service in Chesterfield County, just outside of the city of Richmond. The church has purchased 23 acres of land in the Chesterfield community and holds service each Sunday morning at 9:15 a.m. at a county high school. Some fear has arisen as persons have placed their stake in the ground and are determined to remain at the Hull Street site rather than experiencing the great move of God at the county location. A constant reminder, that we are not moving, rather expanding, has to be shared often and expressed strongly, that the congregants might grasp the thought of a new form of evangelism. This out-of-the-box evangelistic effort has resulted in tremendous growth as the service has grown from 15 families sent to seed the service in 2005 to almost 400 worshipers each Sunday. The church continues to grow as a result of the preached word and the engagement of members of the congregation in meaningful ministry roles in which utilizing one's gift is key to the process.

The Opportunity

It is the rare and unique make-up of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond that provides a great opportunity to develop a model of ministry that utilizes the strength of the great preachers currently part of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond ministry team. Under the current leadership, the church has created a staff of five full-time seminary-trained ministers and several seminary-trained associates. Every preacher has a unique focus, but the seminary training and the opportunities provided for the preacher, has birthed a staff of preachers quite able and currently preaching the prophetic word of God. The church has a reputation for great preaching and teaching and is seen as a leader in the community. Key to its community focus is a pastor of 36 years who during

his tenure has served as chairman of the Richmond City School board; as a Delegate to the Virginia House of Delegates for 15 years and as mentioned previously is the current Mayor of the city of Richmond, Virginia. This provides a very interesting model of ministry which has been embraced by the congregation.

It is here that this writer sees potential for linking the prophetic preaching and teaching of the word of God to create prophetic community. The combination of a socially active, progressive and visionary pastor, a community-focused ministry and a strong preaching aggregation offer the ingredients of a great recipe for building prophetic community. Linda L. Clader in *Voicing the Vision: Imagination and Prophetic Preaching* posits that in order for the prophetic community to exist, we must offer the congregation a means to see life “God’s way.”¹⁰ The challenge is to not only see life God’s way, but to live life “God’s way.” This writer believes today’s preacher competes with many voices seeking the time and resources and ear of the believer. With the many voices vying for the believer, this writer believes the preacher must be passionate about preaching and feel compelled to deliver a word which results in transformed lives and challenges the believer to live life God’s way.

This is the same message that Walter Brueggemann in *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah* proposes that the sovereign word of God is not an absolute, everywhere and always the same. It is a particular, concrete word spoken to particular persons in particular contexts, to impact persons, to impinge upon perception and awareness, to intrude upon public policy, and if possible to evoke faith

⁹ Linda L. Clader, *Voicing the Vision: Imagination and Prophetic Preaching* (Pittsburgh, PA: Moorehouse Publishing, 1989), 6.

and transformed behavior.¹¹ The prophet's responsibility is to deliver the word of God in such a way that the hearer feels compelled to live differently, to move to higher levels in the Christian Journey.

As preachers of the gospel, we are called by God as special agents of change. As Samuel DeWitt Proctor states in *A Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, those called who are able to take ordinary words and, by this mystery of preaching in the Spirit, to lead persons into a relationship with God through the Incarnate Word, Jesus.¹² It is out of this that this writer believes one is able to navigate this thing we call life and grow in relationship with the Lord.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press), 7.

¹² Samuel D. Proctor, *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 6.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature in this chapter seeks to explore prophetic preaching, preaching and spiritual growth literature which will undergird the writer's project. The writer also chose to review spiritual growth literature and small group literature (which was provided as an alternative study opportunity for project participants). In addition, the writer has included other supplemental resources utilized.

The peer group focused on preaching and leadership. We explored various preaching methods and styles, studied leadership models and explored tools to enhance preaching. In addition, we explored leadership styles and methods in various settings. The objective of the peer group was to provide opportunities to explore and be exposed to a diverse group of preaching and leadership styles while examining our own preaching and leadership styles, methods and preferences.

The research for this project focuses on models of prophetic preaching and methods of teaching which would result in developing prophetic community. This review of literature provides an overview of the resources utilized for this project.

The Craft of Conducting Research served as a guide for the Research project. The authors offered information on conducting research. For the writer, the most helpful section was organizing around the elements of one's argument. The authors state that to impose a useful order on all the information you need a principle of organization that

comes not from the categories of your data but from the logic of the answers to support it.¹

In *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, John W. Creswell provides an excellent approach to doing research using mixed methods. The resource was helpful in providing information on organization of literature review and providing differentiation about qualitative versus quantitative methods of research.²

Abraham Heschel in *The Prophets*, offers this writer an insight into who the prophets are and their significance. Heschel outlines the role of the prophet and their tasks as those called to convey a divine view and speaks from a perspective of God as perceived from the perspective the prophet's situation.³

In *Preaching as A Theological Task* Thomas Long and Edward Farley, editors, offer writings which helped to frame this writer's thoughts on the impact of daily experiences on preaching and how scripture should speak to these situations. The focus of the writing was an exploration of the relationship between the world, the gospel and scripture and the relevance for preaching and theology.⁴

¹ Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Conducting Research*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 111-125.

² John W. Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009).

³ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2000), viii.

⁴ Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley Editors, *Preaching As A Theological Task*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996).

Emil G. Kraeling in *Commentary on the Prophets, Volume I* provides for this writing not only a definition of the prophet, but an understanding of the prophet and the message the writers sought to convey.⁵

Otto Justice Baab in *Prophetic Preaching: A New Approach* helps this work by offering a description of the role of the prophetic preaching today. Baab describes the challenges and conflicts impacting the prophetic preacher of today. He proposes that while the prophetic preacher today does not experience the same problems and challenges as his ancient predecessors, these problems and challenges are still felt. Baab offers to this writer the essence of the passion with which ancient prophets wrote. He writes that popular belief views the prophets of Israel as fierce and forbidding individuals, fiery and at times even ferocious in their stern attacks upon existing evils. Their choice of short, pungent, arresting words and the emotional manner of their speeches is revealed in their writings.⁶ Baab's vision of the prophetic message of Israel is described as sudden, roaring tumultuous stream as opposed to still waters.

Carol Dempsey in *Hope Amid the Ruins* provides insight into the ethics of the prophetic message. Dempsey also helps the writer to understand the ethics of the prophets and the multifaceted ways which God is portrayed by the prophetic texts. Dempsey writes that what readers now see and hear is not the actual voice of God, but rather the voices of prophets, authors, redactors, and final editors, who try to communicate their experience of history and their experience of God.⁷

⁵ Emil G. Kraeling, *Commentary on the Prophets Volume I* (Camden, NJ: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1966), 15-16.

⁶ Otto J. Baab, *Prophetic Preaching: A New Approach* (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1958), 13.

⁷ Carol J. Dempsey, *Hope Amid the Ruins* (St. Louis: Chalice Press), 2.

Jean-Pierre Prévost served as a valuable resource for this writer. His work *How to read the Prophets* provides a great model understanding of reading prophetic works, bringing out the main features of each of the prophetic books and the relationship between the prophets. The writer also benefited from Prévost's definition of the prophet as one who speaks before the community, who addresses a community. He further defines the prophet as one who also adopts a position in relation to the people, putting himself in front of them in order to confront them with the demands of the covenant.⁸

Walter Brueggemann in *Prophetic Imagination*, helped to frame the writer's understanding of the task of prophetic ministry (or the work of the prophets). According to Brueggemann, the prophet is called to be a child of the tradition, one who has taken it seriously in the shaping of his or her own field of perception and system of language, who is so at home in that memory that the points of contact and incongruity with the situation of the church in culture can be discerned and articulated with proper urgency⁹. For the writer, Brueggemann clearly describes the burden of preaching the word prophetically, this urgency that demands the prophet communicate this word to God's people. The writer discovered, in this writing, details about the major work of Jesus as a prophet.

Marvin McMickle in *Living Water for Thirsty Souls* offered for the writer an excellent definition of the prophetic sermon. McMickle defines the prophetic sermon as a style of preaching in which the corrective and challenging message of the text is updated and directed to the contemporary congregation. The content and authority reflected in the

⁸ Jean-Pierre Prévost, *How to Read the Prophets* (Great Britain: SCM Press Ltd., 1997), 8.

⁹ Walter J. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 2.

biblical prophets is present in the sermon and does not reside in the opinions or person of the preacher, but in the courage of the preacher to stand up and say, “Thus says the Lord.”¹⁰ This definition so resonated deep within the spirit of the writer. It is this courage to speak that the writer believes is so characteristic of the prophetic voice.

In *The Prophet and His Message*, Michael J. Williams provided for the writer a glimpse of God’s redemptive plan and provides a definition of the role of prophet and what it means today.¹¹ Williams’ writing provides a bridge for the church today which speaks to the focus of this project. He also provides an excellent definition of a prophet as one who “calls out” or “speaks for the word of God, but goes on to explain this speaking forth as the Hebrew word for “to bubble forth.” Therefore, for Williams, the prophet is one from whom words “bubble forth” under divine inspiration in a state of religious agitation usually referred to as ecstasy.

In *What Does the Lord Require*, Bruce Birch offers to this writing a message of the faith resident in the Israelite community and how they were directed through prophets to a deeper inner commitment and more courageous ministry and witness.¹²

James Harris in *Pastoral Theology* brings to this writing further discussion about liberation theology and the role of the Pastor in developing policies and programs that help convey the meaning of the Christian walk in practical terms.¹³ Harris’ premise is that it is a personal responsibility to take part in one’s own growth.

¹⁰ Marvin A. McMickle, *Living Water for Thirsty Souls* (Valley Forge: Judson Press), 213.

¹¹ Michael J. Williams, *The Prophet and His Message* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company), 51.

¹² Bruce Birch, *What Does the Lord Require: The Old Testament Call to Social Witness* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 44.

¹³ James Harris, *Pastoral Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 91.

Kirk Byron Jones in *The Jazz of Preaching* provides for the writer great insight into why we preach.¹⁴ Its ultimate goal is the transformation of lives. Jones' writing makes a compelling case marrying the art of jazz to the art of preaching allowing one to construct a sermon that captures the heart of the hearer and announces "I have something to say" for God.

J. Phillip Wogaman in *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* offers for this writer a view of the importance of the Social Gospel in the life of the church.¹⁵ This gospel according to Wogaman was grounded in individual prophetic spirits and reform-minded organizations.

Donald K. McKim, in his essay *Preaching As Empowered Speech*, provides for this writer a definition of proclamation. McKim writes that the gospel is proclamation of Jesus Christ carried out persuasively; for, if the gospel is too meaningful or "make sense," it must be proclaimed in ways that are "persuasive."¹⁶

Preaching

In order to explore the prophetic preaching as a model for spiritual growth, the writer believes one must first define preaching. This writer defines preaching as the proclamation of the word of God as it is revealed through scripture. When one defines

¹⁴ Kirk Byron Jones, *The Jazz of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 72.

¹⁵ J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁶ Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, *Preaching As a Theological Task* (Louisville: John Knox Press), 129.

preaching as such, there must be engagement between the proclaimer and the text, and the preacher and God. The writer review reviewed several preaching resources.

Fred Craddock in *Preaching*, defines preaching as making present and appropriate to the hearers the revelation of God.¹⁷ The writer concurs with Craddock in that the preached word should provide a sense of what does this mean for me today, at this time, in this context. According to Craddock, from the transaction we call revelation, we understand and implement the transaction we call preaching which from silence, is heard in a whisper or sometimes shouted from the housetop.¹⁸

Preaching is not to be taken lightly. But as Thomas Long records in *The Witness of Preaching*, is a trusted role. Long writes that to be a preacher is to be entrusted with the task of speaking the one word humanity most urgently and desperately needs to hear, the glad tidings of God's redemption through Jesus Christ. To be a preacher is to be a midwife. We do not create the word; we do not establish the time of its arriving; we cannot eliminate the labor pains that surround it; but we serve with gratitude at its coming and exclaim with joy at its birth.

For J. Daniel Baumann, author of *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching*, offers that to preach is to communicate biblical truth by man to men with the explicit purpose of eliciting behavioral change.¹⁹ This writer believes that Baumann opens the door to the prophetic word of God when he posits that behavioral change, i.e.,

¹⁷ Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 51.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

¹⁹ J. Daniel Baumann. *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 13.

transformation, results from the preached word. It is this spiritual growth opportunity that the writer sees as directly related to the prophetic word of God.

Prophetic Preaching

Critical to any conversation on prophetic preaching is a working definition of prophetic preaching. Prophetic preaching is that which speaks which speaks life into the believer and is manifested as a changed and transformed personhood such that the hearer in layman's terms is actively engaged in the life and ministry of the church such that the Kingdom of God here on earth continues to grow.

J. Philip Wogaman in *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World*, writes that the prophet has a singular grasp of what God intends and that through the prophet, God's people have a window into the reality of God and how the reality of God can shape and direct their existence.²⁰ His belief is that as a prophetic preacher one cannot profess to know the whole mind of God. This definition speaks to the responsibility of the prophet as well as the believer. It implies the message of God is a tool shaping and guiding the lifestyle of the believer. Yet it also describes the opportunity available to the believer if willing to hear the voice of God through the message of the prophet. Wogaman believes that genuine prophetic preaching draws people into the reality of God in such a way that they cannot any longer be content with conventional wisdom and superficial existence. This is the challenge facing this writer — the burden of feeling responsible for moving God's people to a place in which they cannot be satisfied with a Sunday only spiritual journey.

²⁰ J. Philip Wogaman, *Speaking the truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 4.

In order for prophetic community to exist, there must be a transformative passion left resident with the hearer that evokes a call to action. This writer senses a community in which God's people have been lulled in to a false sense of security. Prophetic preaching is believed to be present, but this writer is burdened by listeners who fail to respond, thus missing the opportunity to grow into deeper spiritual levels in their walk with God. It is the word of the prophet when proclaimed as the very voice of God that moves one from hearing to doing, existing to being, from watching to working.

Obery Hendricks in *The Politics of Jesus*, believes that prophecy has often been associated with foretelling the future, offering predictions of what is come. The Old Testament term for prophet is "nabi", which means "one called" or "one commissioned." The word "nabi" corresponds to the Greek prophets (spokesperson), from which we get the English word "prophet." This indicates the primary task of the biblical prophets which was not foretelling in the name of God, but forth-telling in God's name. It is Hendricks position that as forth-tellers the prophets were commissioned to oppose oppression and injustice of those in positions of authority.²¹ This writer agrees with Hendrick's definition of prophetic preaching. It is this "forth-telling" that the writer describes as "speaking life to the believer." Hendricks so rightly states that the role of the prophet is to challenge status quo and effect change.²² As much as the prophet serves as the voice piece of God, transformation cannot occur without the willingness of the people to be obedient to the call of God. As the message goes forth, something must arise within the spirit of the listener that evokes a desire to be obedient to the call of God as declared by the prophet. Without this dialogue, transformation will probably be limited.

²¹ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics of Jesus*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 27-28.

²² Ibid, 29.

Walter Brueggemann in *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah*, contends that words matter because they limit and permit the reality in which society lives. Prophets therefore, he writes, attend to words in quite specific and concrete ways.²³ Brueggemann's statement challenges the prophet to use words which frame disciplines to the listener and encourage obedience to God. This writer believes that it is these carefully chosen words, in which the prophet, as inspired by God, proclaims to the believer, granting permission to live out the words "Thus says the Lord."

Brueggemann in his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, delineates the importance of the prophet in serving as both criticizer of the existing order and energizer of persons and communities, moving them back to the central issues of their faith – those, which, by providing an alternative consciousness toward the world, supply the community of believers with a new vitality and understanding of their own wholeness and possibilities.²⁴ What Brueggemann describes is the passion to not live a status quo spiritual life but as a result of ingesting the word one gains vitality to move beyond their present spiritual state.

J. Alfred Smith, in "Preaching and Worship in the African American Church", writes that Black preaching as almost a medicine for the believer, defines prophetic preaching as a means of challenging the listener to live a changed life. He captures this sentiment in this statement: "Black preaching as spiritual pharmacology is preaching that has a medicinal aspect of providing psycho-spiritual healing for souls wounded by a cruel world. The idea of black preaching as spiritual and social transformation has both priestly

²³ Walter Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press), 7.

²⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 3

and prophetic dimensions. Hearers are challenged to grow spiritually and to live ethically and responsibly as true disciples of Jesus Christ.”²⁵ We don’t use the word ethics often in the church. Ethics are implied in every fabric of Christian life. However, if the prophetic word of God is to yield spiritual growth, there must be a strong life ethic that moves the believer to live within the parameters sanctioned by God. As the words of the prophet are spoken, this writer believes they become somewhat medicinal, speaking healing and obedience to broken people, systems and ways of life.

Prophets according to Brad R. Braxton in the article, “*Three Questions about Prophets: WHO, WHY, AND HOW?*” are “people who see with their “third eye” and hear with their third ear.”²⁶ Braxton, former professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee, learned this lesson as a pastor when one of his parishioners suggested he investigate every situation in life with a third lens. Braxton believes he discovered what he describes as a “prophetic sensibility” that inspires one’s preaching.²⁷ It is this prophetic sensibility that this writer believes gives the prophet entry into the world of the believer and a sense of the needs of the community. This third lens does belong to the preacher, but this writer believes it is God inspired.

It is the message of the prophet that should raise a certain level of consciousness in the hearer such that a transformed lifestyle is not only desired but sought. As the issue of prophetic preaching today is addressed, congregations must be challenged to move to

²⁵ J. Alfred Smith. “Preaching and Worship in the African American Church,” in *Growing The African American Church*, ed. Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 49.

²⁶ Brad R. Braxton, “Three Questions about Prophets: WHO, WHY, AND HOW?,” *The African - American Pulpit* (Fall 2008): 8.

²⁷ Ibid, 9.

action after hearing God's word. At stake are the spiritual growth and development of disciples and the building of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

In Samuel K. Roberts's book, *Born to Preach: Essays in Honor of the Ministry of Henry & Ella Mitchell*, preaching is as Miles Jones describes an exercise in submitting to scripture as though the whole Word of God were a sermon for his benefit. He does not seek to find a sermon in the Scripture until first the confession is made that he or she has been found by the grace to which the Scriptures point."²⁸ While Miles Jones was not defining prophetic preaching, it describes for this writer the kind of investment the preacher must make in order that the hearer is provoked to action. In other words, the hearer seeks to become a "follower of Jesus" as opposed to a doer of the word. It is what some may reference as teaching disciples to fish thereby ensuring a lifetime of tools necessary for personal growth and development. It is what serves as the catalyst to answering each time a sermon is heard, whether in words or lesson: "What does this mean for me?"

J. Alfred Smith in *Speak Until Justice Wakes: Prophetic Reflections from J. Alfred Smith*, writes about Peter Taylor Forsyth, a deceased pastor, preacher, professor and principal of Hackney Theological College. Smith writes that Forsythe taught that we must preach Christ and not preach about Christ. We must place Christ before people; Christ, and not our oratory, draws persons to God. Christ creates faith in the will of gospel hearers.²⁹

²⁸Samuel K. Roberts, *Born to Preach: Essays in Honor of the Ministry of Henry & Ella Mitchell* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 59.

²⁹ J. Alfred Smith *Speak Until Justice Wakes: Prophetic Reflections From J. Alfred Smith*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 32.

Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III, in *African American Church Growth* describes four basic tenets which serve as presuppositions to prophetic ministry and dynamic church growth, which have Old and New Testament foundations:

1. Prophetic Passion – the ability to feel, to sense viscerally the Word of God, and to respond with the heart, head and soul in the context of community; the persuasion that empowers human action and is strongly based upon faith and belief.
2. Prophetic Conviction – the irrepressible desire or will to “live the Word” through human experience;
3. Prophetic Investment – a desire to fully and unequivocally invest oneself in serving the Lord.
4. Prophetic Vision – daring to ask “where would God have us go? What must we do to get there?”³⁰

It is this writer’s position that Stewart is absolutely on target with these presuppositions. For if these tenets serve as the basis for the preacher, then a natural growth in the people will occur. The prophet sees the word as a personal investment in God’s people. Churches can grow numerically and spiritually but spiritual growth is perhaps most important in understanding and sustaining the dynamics of all church growth.³¹

The Preacher Prophet

³⁰ Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *African American Church Growth: 12 Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 22-38.

³¹ Ibid, xiv.

According to Abraham Heschel, in *The Prophets*, the prophet is a person, not a microphone. He is endowed with mission, with the power of a word not his own that accounts for his greatness – but also with temperament, concern, character and individuality...The word of God reverberated in the voice of man.³² It is this challenge that the writer believes the community of faith faces today. Has the voice of God been replaced with the “noise of the microphone” thus distorting in some sense, the very message of God? A better statement of the writer’s position is that personality has replaced prophet, and microphone has replaced messenger. This mission that Heschel speaks of must be a passionate part of the prophet’s mandate in order for the message of the prophet to effect transformation in the life of the believer. It is the “power of this word that does not belong to the prophet” that provides the transformative potential in the life of the believer. In other words, when the word is preached it is the word of God that transforms and not man. Too much emphasis has been placed on personality and not the prophetic voice.

William Willimon in *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* quotes Harry Emerson Fosdick, the father of liberal preaching in North America, who describes the preacher’s task: “The preacher’s business is not merely to discuss repentance, but to persuade people to repent: not merely to debate the meaning and possibility of the Christian faith, but to produce Christian faith in the lives of his listeners; not merely to talk about the available power of God to bring victory over trouble and temptation, but to send people out from their worship on Sunday with victory in their possession.”³³ While

³² Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2000), viii.

³³ William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 90.

Willimon was not attempting to describe prophetic preaching as he wrote, what this writer sees is a job description for the preacher. He expresses exactly the mandate of the prophet. The prophet's responsibility is to preach in such a fashion that the listener begins to live out the Christian faith in a manner that speaks victory over defeat, life over death, hope rather than despair. The listener should leave service with a mandate to do, to be and to become. Carl Barth's definition of preaching, not utilizing prophetic, speaks to the charge to the prophetic preacher: "Preaching is a speech of those human beings who are empowered to speak to other human beings who gather in the worship service of the congregation, in the middle of the present world, and are addressed by the triune God as an expression of God's presence, on the basis of scripture, by the Holy Spirit, in the hope of God's own work and correction through the sermon."³⁴ It is this hope of God's work and the correction of the sermon that addresses the response required on the part of the listener as the word of God is proclaimed. This is the prophetic word of God that goes forth and yields transformed lives as a result of hearing the voice of God through the prophet.

Robert McNeill in *Prophet, Speak Now* states that prophecy is a spirit of power and not of prediction. Contrary to what some believe, speaking prophetically is not about future predictions. Too often, the voice of the prophetic is misunderstood as a message of future events, as opposed to speaking power into the life of the believer, which is how this writer describes prophetic preaching. McNeill's paints a wonderful picture of the prophets in which he states that "the best way to describe the classical prophets is to show

³⁴ Ibid, 173.

them to be the enigma that they were. They were men of vision but not impractical dreamers. Visions are not disjointed dreams but insights merged into pictures.”³⁵

Prophetic preaching must be viewed as a window which provides a picture of future hope and promises. It is not about predicting what will happen, but based on the power of the words of the prophets, speaks to the promise of a great future. For the listener, it is the power that will be gained if obedient to God’s word. The prophetic word allows the listener to hear the voice of God through the prophet, receive the word of and apply it to present circumstances while looking towards the promise of the future. It is this application that serves as a catalyst such that spiritual growth and development can occur.

In *Not as the Scribes: Jesus as a Model for Prophetic Preaching*, Ryan Ahlgrim describes well the true challenge the preacher faces today. Ahlgrim suggests that pastors and preachers today should speak as Jesus spoke utilizing a preaching style that “engages the whole person, heart, mind and soul, in communication that is relational, dialogical and communal. Prophetic preaching contributes to and participates in, the chemistry of transformation to offer the good news of the kingdom as Jesus did is to speak from the authority of personal and communal experience, to enact biblically-based themes. Prophetic preaching joins the chemistry of transformation because it arises from the dynamics of the transformed and the transforming heart.”³⁶ It is this “good news” that Ahlgrim speaks of that provides the transforming power to create prophetic community when prophetic preaching and teaching are present. This writer believes that prophetic

³⁵ Robert B. McNeill, *Prophet, Speak Now!* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961), 18.

³⁶ Ryan Ahlgrim, *Not as Scribes: Jesus as a Model for Prophetic Preaching* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 10.

community can be established when the voice of the prophet provides a future hope that helps the listener to find him or herself in the message, and receives the mandate from God to act upon the words heard.

Henry H. Mitchell in *Celebration & Experience in Preaching* suggests that we must preach to the whole person. Mitchell states "...the hearer is to be involved holistically in the sermon event, in order to beget or nourish a faith that involves the entire person." In the temptation experience, Jesus is recorded (Matthew 44) as quoting Deuteronomy 8:3: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Although human beings need bread, Jesus is voicing that certain truth that ultimate existence is based on the very word of God. The preached word, then, is literally to be lived.³⁷ Mitchell's implication here is that there should be some transformation, a sense in which the hearer applies the preach word as life is lived. The writer believes that the hearer's intentional involvement in the word is the seed of transformation. This writer visualizes the transformation as a cyclical process in which

- 1) the prophet receives the word from God;
- 2) the prophet delivers the word to the people;
- 3) a period of reflection and life application occurs.

Samuel K. Roberts suggests in an essay, *The Moral Task of African-American Preaching* in *Born to Preach: Essays in Honor of the Ministry of Henry Ella Mitchell*, suggests that the prophetic tradition within black preaching has resonated the righteous indignation of Old Testament prophecy. What Roberts believes is that the preacher, just

³⁷ Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 17.

like the Old Testament prophet is called an unjust nation to a place of repentance and righteousness.³⁸ This suggests that the prophet's role is to speak on behalf of God to the people a word that commands some change in one's being. This calling is to a life of moral and ethical behavior that exemplifies the Christian character.

In *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*, Samuel DeWitt Proctor offers that preaching at its best will begin where the people are and educate them on the possibilities of refined and improved human relations.³⁹ This writer supports this statement, as it is necessary for one to understand context as the word of God is proclaimed. As God spoke through the prophet, there was most often a clear understanding of the problems and challenges facing the community. So the prophet often dealt with people in relation to the circumstances they faced in life. Preaching according to Proctor prepares persons for the challenges of life because it deals with life's extremities without apology. Preaching is different because it has the audacity to ask us to live as though we had to report to God at any minute.⁴⁰ What growth this writer believes would be evidenced in many congregations, if as the prophet declares the word and people lived as if they were accountable to God. This issue of holding oneself accountable is probably not unique to the First Baptist Church of South Richmond. Proctor boldly challenges the preacher to declare the word in such away that it improves the way we live life in community, but also have a sense of responsibility as the word of God is proclaimed.

J. Philip Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* cites a poem by James Russell Lowell to describe how God, through the

³⁸ Ibid, 71.

³⁹ Samuel D. Procter, *Certain Sound of the Trumpet* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 17.

prophet can shape and direct the existence of a people. Though written in a different context, Wogaman believes the poem, entitled “Columbus”, suggestively captures the role of a prophet:

For I believed the poets; it is they
Who utter wisdom from the central deep;
And, listening to the inner flow of things,
Speak to the age out of eternity.⁴¹

Wogaman posits that one could use these words to write the job description of the prophet which is to speak for another is to grasp first, the mind of the other.⁴² He does not believe that the prophet can grasp the mind of God, but rather is drawn into the reality of who God is, such that he or she dispenses any sense of conventional or superficial existence. This writer concurs and believes that one cannot assume the responsibility of prophet without consuming what this writer wants to describe as the “whole” of God. There must be an absolute oneness with God and a passion, even burden, to realize a transformed people as a result of hearing the word through the prophet. The Church, as Wogaman so rightly states, must become less of a conforming institution and find ways to deepen the lives of the people so that culture does not dictate and be the influence driving God’s people.⁴³ In this age of visual, characterized by an increasingly frightening rate of non-verbal communication, it is crucial that the prophet resume his or her voice for God taking seriously the mandate to deepen one’s spiritual depth.

Wogaman believes that a requisite for the prophet as the voice of God is that the Pastor must sincerely care for the flock. Being a pastor contributes to the effectiveness of

⁴¹ J. Philip Wogman, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 4.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 20.

the prophet.⁴⁴ This writer supports this statement. Only when people know you care do they care about what you speak or what you think. The title pastor does not equate to prophetic, although time seems to be trending this way. This writer wants to suggest that this may very well be the challenge for the 21st Century Church. The love of self can contaminate the love of God's people, thereby distorting the message the prophet receives from God, if not careful. As God's spokespersons, the prophet is called to "speak the truth in love." But this truth cannot be spoken unless the prophet has a sense of the human condition of God's people.

This is what Obrey M. Hendricks in *The Politics of Jesus* describes as giving a voice to voiceless, a sacred duty of those called. Hendricks posits that being a voice is a powerful strategy for political change, which when employed speaks truth to power and demystifies the might of those cloaked in the mystique of invulnerability.⁴⁵

Building Prophetic Community

Prophetic community can only be established when spiritual growth and development opportunities are birthed out of the word of God for the particular context in which the word is delivered. The listener must hear the words of the prophets of old "thus says the Lord" even when the messenger does not use these four simple words. It is a message of action which must be heard in order for the prophetic community to be developed.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 21.

⁴⁵ Obrey M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics of Jesus* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 131.

Prophetic preaching reaches to the heart and soul of the preacher. It is a burning desire to speak life in to the believer such that they become agents of change in a dark world. O. M. Hendricks in a lecture entitled *The Prophetic Imperative: Reclaiming the Gospel by Speaking Truth to Power* suggests that to be a prophet and to be prophetic means one must have an understanding of the call to ministry. He states that the core of prophecy is forth-telling telling the truth of God because God has said so: “Thus saith the Lord,” was the prophet’s mantra. Hendricks outlines the assignments of the prophet:

1. They stood up and spoke out against what was going on in society.
2. They used good judgment, they weren’t reckless, but they didn’t count the cost.
3. They chose where they spoke and to whom they should speak, but they did not jockey around to find the safest spots and points of least resistance.
4. They spoke the truth of God as they knew it and where faithful to their calling.

This writer must agree with Hendricks position that there is a price to be paid for prophesying for there is no cheap grace.⁴⁶ The focus of this study is to move a congregation to find balance in hearing a word from the Lord and translating this word into a deeper spiritual relationship with the Lord, reflected in the response to God’s word.

Dr. Ricky Woods, faculty member of the United Theological Seminary, in Dayton Ohio, in a lecture on Prophetic Utterance proposed that one of the measures of a faithful prophetic ministry is one that holds both judgment and restoration in tension. Dr. Woods believes that it is never God’s intent to punish His people, but it comes to correct and to

⁴⁶ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., Lecture: *The Prophetic Imperative: Reclaiming the Gospel by Speaking Truth to Power*, 2006.

reestablish the rule and reign of God in the community.⁴⁷ This correction and re-establishment is the vehicle through which the believer moves towards being a part of the prophetic community. It is only when one knows the guidelines and parameters that living in the tension of judgment (being held accountable for our actions) and restoration (the saving grace of God) that true spiritual growth can thrive.

Samuel DeWitt Proctor suggests that the Good News of the gospel is that God knows our origin and our condition and yet, through the prophets and through the grace of God, as preachers we are called to walk in lofty places.⁴⁸ Proctor's position is a call to the prophet to deliver a message of hope which not so much expresses the exposure of the depths to which humankind can sink, but heights to which we are beckoned.⁴⁹ It is a call to the preacher to share the many possibilities of renewal and restoration thereby experiencing spiritual and moral wholeness.

It is the passion for the preached word of God, with a life-inspiring passion that is coupled with teaching, which this writer hypothesizes speaks a message of life and hope to the believer and thus will yield prophetic community. As God's people respond to the mandates from the Lord, the potential for prophetic community and spiritual growth begins to develop.

⁴⁷ Ricky Woods, Lecture: *Prophetic Utterance and the Black Church*, October 2008.

⁴⁸ Samuel D. Proctor: *How Shall They Hear? Effective Preaching Vital for Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992), 34.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Katie Canon posits that preaching is a dialogue which doesn't mean that parishioners are actually talking back to you as you preach, but does mean that as you talk questions emerge – What? How? Why? ¹ It is this writer's position that the goal of prophetic preaching should be questions raised by the listener (as a result of this dialogue) that impress upon the spirit a desire to move to greater spiritual levels and depths. The bible is replete with examples of the prophet speaking a word on behalf of the Lord which often reflected a response by God's people.

The great prophets of the bible were those convinced that they had been called by the God of Israel. They were furthered by the active intervention of the Lord of history, the self-revealed Redeemer of Israel. God had specifically summoned them to embark upon an often repugnant career of prophecy to a stubborn nation. ²

As one explores the biblical and historical roles of the prophet, one discovers that the prophets were speakers for God who assisted God's people in weathering the difficulty of being exiled from their land. Prophets served as the voice piece, commissioned by God to deliver a message or accomplish some task for God. Some

¹ Katie Geneva Cannon, *Teaching Preaching* (Lexington, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2002), 32.

² Otto J. Baab, *Prophetic Preaching: A New Approach* (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1958), 15.

prophets readily accepted assignments, but others like Moses, Jonah and Jeremiah were filled with uncertainty and either ran from God or wanted to be excused because of their limitations. God used prophets to deliver words of discipline and words of encouragement to his people. As we examine biblical precedents for prophetic preaching we discover that God always used prophets to convey specific messages or tasks to his people. These messengers were those who shaped the moral and ethical character of the Christian community.

Biblical Foundations

Biblical scholarship puts the literary prophets – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah in a class by themselves, calling them the classical prophets and designating the time of their writings, the eighth through the sixth century B.C.³ A review of the Old Testament provides a roll call of prophets used by God to proclaim His word.

In Exodus 3, Moses was called by God and commissioned to lead God's people out of bondage. So now, go I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10).⁴ As challenging as this task is, Moses goes to Pharaoh in Exodus 5 and is not pleasantly received. Yet this writer wants to note the response. Jeremiah was commanded by God to get ready and say whatever God commanded (Jeremiah 1:17).⁵ The prophet's call did not provide opportunity for disobedience. Rather it was a mandate from God to deliver a word to God's people.

³ Robert B. McNeill, *Prophet, Speak Now!* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961), 17.

⁴ Exodus 3:10.

⁵ Jeremiah 1:17.

Jonah was called by God to deliver a word to Nineveh about its wickedness (Jonah 1:1).⁶ Rather than deliver the word as God commissioned, Jonah was disobedient and ran away from the Lord. Before the prophet speaks there is always a call from God to deliver a word.

Biblically we must not only deal with responsibility of the prophet to deliver the prophetic word but even the hearer's responsibility to respond to the word of God – What does this mean for me? Dr. Terry Thomas, in his book *Becoming a Fruit-Bearing Disciple*, suggests that there must be active listening in order for the hearer to take responsibility for what is taught. Thomas writes “Listening involves accepting and receiving a message as it is sent while seeking to understand what the sender of the message meant; It is listening with the intent to understand. When we do this we become highly tuned receivers.”⁷ Thomas offers a model of responsibility and accountability on the part of the hearer of God's word. The prophet delivers, but the hearer, has the charge to actively pursue a lifestyle of “hanging out with the Holy Spirit” as Thomas describes it to apply the word to life. The word of God then becomes for the hearer a living tool, active and present in the ongoing spiritual life and development of the believer. Listening with the intent to understand implies a desire to engage the message in some way to one's journey.

The toughest test that one can face in moral and spiritual growth is to find a way to live *in* the real world of practicality and compromise with becoming *of* the world.⁸

⁶ Jeremiah 1:1.

⁷ Terry Thomas, *Becoming A Fruit-Bearing Disciple* (Raleigh, NC: Voice of Rehoboth Publishing, 2005), 119.

⁸ Samuel D. Proctor, *How Shall They Hear?* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992), 81.

Israel's prophets are best viewed not as moralists or idealists, but as poets, storytellers, and preachers who, because of their great love of God and all creation, are willing – however reluctantly – to proclaim an unpopular yet steadfast love. Concerned not only with advocating a quality of life that finds expression in and through right relationships with both human and non-human life, the prophet continually reminded people of the wholeness and holiness of all creation, and the effects that human sin has on it.⁹ This adequately describes the role the prophet Amos played in conveying the word of the Lord to the Israelites. Amos advocated obedience to God and expressed impending judgment if the people did not turn from their wicked ways. The challenge of the prophet was to preach an unpopular message. This is not unlike the charge to the preacher today. The prophet today has the responsibility of interpreting the word of God in its historical context while providing a relevant message for the believer today. Carol Dempsey in *Hope Amid the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel's* writes: “Prophets believe the prophet’s message heard in the context of contemporary times is time-conditioned yet timeless.”¹⁰ This is the beauty of the prophetic writings. They are as relevant today as they were in biblical times. There is a unique opportunity to provide hope to present day listeners. We are able to benefit from these timeless messages when we use a midrash to inquire of text. *Midrash* comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to go in search of” or to “inquire.” Midrash is the name of the process of inquiring into the scriptures for their meaning. Midrash is the name for both our encounter with biblical stories as we seek meaning for

⁹ Carol J. Dempsey, *Hope Amid the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel's Prophets* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 47.

¹⁰ Ibid.

our lives and times and the stories that emerge to express meaning.¹¹ The midrash process yields an interpretation of the text which provides an understanding of the message and its relevance for the audience today.

The words of the prophet often took on the structure of a call from God, action on the part of the prophet to deliver the message from God, and a response from the people. Characteristic of the prophets messages from the Lord are the words “this is what the Lord says, or this is what the sovereign Lord says or “thus says the Lord.”

The book of Amos provides an example of the prophetic word of God as proclaimed by one assigned the task of preaching repentance to disobedient people. It opens with words that signal a prophetic word “Thus Says.” While we have no recorded information on Amos’ call by God, we do have documented Amos’s sharing his call story to Amaziah, priest of Bethel – “Amos answered Amaziah, I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, Go prophesy to my people, Now then, hear the word of the Lord (Amos 7:14).”¹²

Amos was called to share a message of repentance to Israel for their disregard for justice and their materialistic passion. He provides a parallel picture of life as we know it today. We live in an age of a people preoccupied with prosperity and material wealth. There is a tension between hearing the word on Sunday morning and how the word is applied to daily life Monday through Saturday. Obedience to the word heard on Sunday has not been evidenced in participation in worship and study opportunities outside of

¹¹ Michael E. Williams *The Storyteller’s Companion to the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 19-20.

¹² Amos 7:14.

Sunday morning. In Amos 5:18-24 the prophet continues share the impending judgment on the people of Israel if they did not return to God. This substantiates the divine call from God which this writer has suggested is a component of prophetic preaching. The people of Israel were prosperous but in their prosperity they had not nurtured their spiritual edge. For Israel the challenge of the day was the people's prosperity. For the First Baptist Church the challenge for the prophet are the many voices vying for the time, resources and commitment of the believer. These verses from Amos provide an example of the failure to be obedient to the judgment of God and the impending consequences.

Amos writes:

¹⁸ Woe to you who long
for the day of the LORD!
Why do you long for the day of the LORD?
That day will be darkness, not light.
¹⁹ It will be as though a man fled from a lion
only to meet a bear,
as though he entered his house
and rested his hand on the wall
only to have a snake bite him.
²⁰ Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?
²¹ "I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
I cannot stand your assemblies.
²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, ^[a]
I will have no regard for them.
²³ Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream

The focus of prophet Amos was the upper classes of people who enjoyed a certain degree of prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II. Amos not only speaks words that draw attention to the injustices of the day, but he also speaks words of encouragement and a vision of future restoration, that speaks of hope and not despair.

In viewing the book of Amos as a whole, one sees that the Amos text consists of nine chapters that can be subdivided into five literary units:

1. Prophecies against Foreign Countries (1:3 – 2:16)
2. Address to the House of Israel (3:1 – 5:17)
3. Triple Warning (5:18 – 6:14)
4. Five Visions (7:1 – 9:10)
5. Promise (9:11-15)

Each of these divisions includes different literary forms: lament, narrative and other literary styles. Carol Dempsey suggests in *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading*, that these forms and devices attest to the literary artistry of the text and support its appeal to the ethical consciousness and theological imagination of its readers. It is this writer's position that Dempsey is suggesting that these literary forms have shaped and misshaped attitudes. Such attitudes, Dempsey writes, have caused oppression or can, and have been the impetus for effecting a deepening reverence and respect for all of life.¹³

Historical Foundations

No other major religion gives preaching quite the central role that it has in Christianity. Along with the sacraments, most Christian bodies consider the proclamation of the Word of God to be the constructive act of the church.¹⁴ The message of the prophets was the word of life for Israel. Grounded in faith in God, it defined the conditions of authentic existence in a world created and ordered by God.¹⁵ The prophetic message although a source of tension for the people of Israel, called them to a better way

¹³ Carol J. Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress), 8-9.

¹⁴ O. C. Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 3.

¹⁵ Carol J. Dempsey, *Hope Amid the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel's Prophets* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 13.

of life living in obedience to God. It is the authentic existence that Carol Dempsey describes above. The purpose of the prophet's message was redemptive.

Although the prophets interpreted history, they did not do so in the manner of modern historians. They did not look back upon a series of occurrences, and try to see a pattern or purpose in them. They gave genuine foreknowledge of events, and justified their faith in doing so by reference to their call from God to declare his message.¹⁶ Prophets were not only interested in delivering a message to God, but often had a burden for the community. It originated in and for the people of God. Everything they did presupposed their participation in this community. Thus the prophets were the voice of Israel, in dialogue with God.¹⁷

The prophet's message was the word of God to Israel. The substance of the message was to deliver to God's people a message of righteous judgment and gracious redemption. When one begins to hear the prophets it provides a sense of listening to a conversation as the prophet is in dialogue with the community.

Although prophecy and the prophetic word have often been regarded as distinctively an Israelite activity, it was widespread in the ancient near east. The actual form of prophecy varied from one society to another. A major source of ancient Near East prophetic activity is found in the royal archives of Mari on the Euphrates and is mentioned in some fifty letters and in twelve economic and administrative texts.¹⁸

¹⁶ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 160.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 284.

In the Ancient Israel community there were three offices with the responsibility of leading God's people, the priest, the king and the prophet. The priest was responsible for sacrifice and intercession. The king had governmental responsibility and was charged with managing God's people in keeping the covenant where justice, righteousness and peace were the three-fold means of ruling.¹⁹ The third office was that of the prophet, one who spoke on behalf of God to the people.

The prophet, unlike the priest or king, is not tied to a place such as an altar or a throne as the places of his authority. The prophet is given freedom to go where ever he is sent and freedom to say whatever he needs to say to whomever it needs to be said. The prophet's sole concern is always about the abuses of power by those who have been put in positions of power to serve God and the people. The prophets appear on the scene to speak, "Thus said the Lord." Prophetic utterance was most often about some pending judgment that Yahweh would bring if there was no repentance and return to doing justly. The prophets then were most concerned with justice in the community. The peace of Shalom would never be possible as long as there were systems of oppression that kept people in bondage.

Prophets in the Near East Community were both male and female and the manner in which messages were received was not always clear. The messages sometimes warned that cultic acts had been neglected and were often presented as being in the self-interest of the king.²⁰

¹⁹ Ricky Woods, *Prophetic Utterance in the Black Church*, Part I, 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

Prophecy in ancient Israel usually focused on the personalities of the prophets whose oracles have been preserved in books that bear their names. Sociologist Max Weber defined the prophet as “a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.” For this writer this very much describes the way prophets are described today, although the word used is “charismatic.” Weber’s definition however affirms the circular nature of history, as it repeats itself.

The Historical context of the prophetic message is the history of the people of Israel, from the last decades of the northern kingdom (ca. 750-722 BCE), through the Babylonian exile of the kingdom of Judah (598-538) and the restoration of the Jerusalem cultic community (ca 520-500), to the reform of Ezra (ca 400).

Prophets were viewed as essential to Israelite religion. They were the first people in whom the divine spark of true knowledge was brought to consciousness by the spirit of God. They served as models of the spiritual heights which all people might someday reach.²¹ It is this writer’s posture that foundations of biblical history serve as a spring board to new models for delivering the word of God. As prophets, today’s voice pieces must seek to serve as models for God’s people to reach deeper relationships with God.

Prophets addressed specific situations in very concrete terms. John R. Collins posits that the message of the prophet cannot be appreciated without consideration of its historical context. According to Collins in *an Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, the biblical prophetic books are often edited with later situations in mind. So, there is an

²¹ Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 156.

inevitable tension between the words of the prophets in their original context, and the “canonical shape” given to their oracles by later editors.²²

Moses made provisions for both priestly and prophetic ministries in Israel. The priestly ministry was established under Aaron and the Levites, while the prophetic ministries were anticipated for the future. The Levites were given responsibility for religious functions and the maintaining of worship. With the erection of the tabernacle, the Levites were given the immediate responsibility of caring for the central sanctuary. Through the prophetic ministry the Israelites were to maintain continual consciousness of God’s will for them as it pertained to the current developments in each generation.²³ The ministry of a prophet as outlined by Moses was that of positive and active proclamation of God’s will. In the course of Israel’s history, the ministry of men who were especially commissioned to speak God’s messages, apparently replaced the use Urim and Thummim (gemstones) which used by the High Priest to determine God's will in some situations).

Prophets, throughout biblical history, have been viewed as spokespersons for God. It was often the word that the people believed delivered directly from the Lord to the prophet that sparked a sense of action to do as God has directed. This message took on several forms:

- Thus says the Lord
- The word of the Lord came to

The prophet Amos is a perfect example of such a messenger. The book of Amos is believed to have launched the first complete prophetic book. Prophecy at this time

²² John R. Collins, *An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2004), 286.

²³ Samuel J. Schultz, *The Prophets Speak* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1968), 52-54.

seemed to have been well on the way to creating its own institutional matrix. It was achieving formalization and broad public recognition as a kind of “regularized criticism” of the established order. It is likely that in some way this prophetic movement took its rise from within cultic institutions (with their asserted monopoly over the voice of Yahweh), but it soon achieved enough institutional and ideological independence to stand on its own – both in communication and at odds with the older established sectors of society.²⁴

Amos identifies himself as a shepherd from Tekoa. Although he dates his prophecy to the time of King Jeroboam son of Joash (785-745 B.C.E.) of Israel, some ten miles south of Jerusalem, Amos seems to have prophesied at Bethel one of the royal sanctuaries of the northern kingdom.²⁵

The only biblical laws that deal with prophecy are found in Deuteronomy. It is here that is recorded several laws governing prophets and the promises of a series of prophets. According to Robert R. Wilson, scholars have long recognized the importance of Deuteronomy 18:9-22, to understand Israelite prophecy. Wilson states that only in recent years has the passage been use to construct a picture of the Deuteronomic prophet.²⁶

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there.¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in ^[a] the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft,¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.¹² Anyone

²⁴ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible, A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 306.

²⁵ John R. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 286.

²⁶ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible, A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 157.

who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.¹³ You must be blameless before the LORD your God.¹⁴ The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so.¹⁵ The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.¹⁶ For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die."²⁷

¹⁷ The LORD said to me: "What they say is good.¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.¹⁹ If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.²⁰ But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

²¹ You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?"²² If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

It is this passage that provides the promise of God's prophet who will proclaim the message of God. Within this passage is the authority and message to hear and heed the words of the prophet. It is here that one might intuit not only the intent of the prophet's role as ordained by God, but also divine nature of the prophet.

The writer in verse sixteen records the enduring concern that God shows for Israel and the promise for a prophet. According to the Hebrew Bible, a prophet is not someone whose main function is to tell the future, stealing knowledge from God and sharing it with the people (see, in contrast, the definition of a Gentile prophet in Deut 18:10-11). A prophet is someone who tells the truth; someone who does not tell us what we want to

²⁷ Deuteronomy 18:9-22.

know, but rather tells us what God wants us to know, diligently reminding us of our covenantal obligations.²⁸

It is interesting to note that the intent was that the prophets would be “raised up” and not self imposed. This writer posits that much of the challenge faced today in the spiritual growth and development of God’s people is the almost overnight, self-imposed prophets preaching “prosperity” rather than a message affecting the believer in such a way that they hear with certainty the voice of God through the prophet.

This writer concurs with Marvin McMickle when he writes that there is no prophetic preaching that is limited to words alone. The things about which the prophet is willing to speak must be the things about which the prophet must be prepared to act. According to McMickle prophets like Martin Luther King, Jr., Sojourner Truth, William Sloane Coffin, Joshua Heschel and Bishop Desmond Tutu are not remembered simply because they spoke eloquently about issues of justice. Rather he believes their words matched their actions.²⁹

The book of Acts also provides a biblical example of the prophetic voice of the Lord. In verse 37 of chapter two it is recorded: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” When the people heard the word of God they were impacted and moved to a sense of doing something with the word of God. This is at its very core a model of prophetic preaching. Peter had just preached a powerful word referring to the prophet Joel’s prophesy of a pouring of the spirit of God on the people. This pouring of the spirit is

²⁸ Messiah Truth, Does Deuteronomy 18 Foretell Coming of a Special Prophet; <http://messiahtruth.org/deut1815.html>(accessed November 15, 2009).

²⁹ Marvin McMickle, "Prophetic Preaching in the 21st Century: It is Not Just About the Words," The African American Pulpit Journal 11, no. 4 (2008): 17.

literally a message of transforming power which is reflected in latter verses of chapter two in the book of Acts as the first century church began. A result of the word of God is clearer outlined in later verses:

- Teaching and Fellowship
- Breaking of bread and prayer
- Sharing and a building of community (small Groups)
- Worship
- Growth in the church

All occurred as a result of the prophetic word of God and what resulted was continued growth of the church and the number of people added to the ministry.

Acts 2:37 and 2:42-47 it is recorded:

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do....They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.³⁰

Within these verses is the response of the people to Peter's preaching at Pentecost.

Here we find what this writer believes is a clear example of the job description of the prophet to declare the word of God such that people feel compelled to respond. Peter's addressing of the crowd reflects a confidence and conviction as he quotes the words of the prophet Joel and goes on to speak of David as a patriarch and prophet. As Peter with conviction speaks of this Jesus who they had crucified who was both Lord and Christ his

³⁰ Acts 2:37, 42-47.

message evokes a response from the crowd. The text says that they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles “what shall we do?” Reflected in this text is really the power resulting from the sermon. It was not only the power inherent in the Holy Spirit showing up as a result of this word, but that the hearts of God’s people were changed following the direction of his servant Peter.

In clearer terms, the people were obedient to the counsel of Peter. When the voice of God is heard it speaks life to the believer such that the hearer feels compelled to respond to the voice of the Lord. This is the power of the prophetic word of God. It is when this prophetic word is ingested into the spirit of the believer that this writer believes that it sounds above the “sermon lite” model which is yielding unbelievable growth in the mega churches of today. When the people “heard” the word their hearts were changed. The bible is filled with examples of persons whose hearts were changed as a result of the transforming power of God. Judas’ heart was changed in Matthew 27:3: When Judas, who had betrayed Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I betrayed innocent blood.” David’s heart was pricked as he asked of God to create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit. Prophetic words not only create changed hearts, but result in changed people, with changed hearts and changed agendas.

The passage in Acts reflects what occurred following Peter’s proclamation of the word of God earlier in the chapter. It was after the Holy Spirit had come upon them at Pentecost. Peter delivers the word of God with power and with passion. The prophetic voice caused the people to respond in such a way that one might believe they felt

compelled to move to action. The question was “what shall we do.” The response was this writer believes a clear reflection of growth:

- They received the apostle’s doctrine and acted on what they had heard.
- They were together in spirit, i.e., on one accord
- The fellowshipped together and served one another living in community.
- They praised God and enjoyed the favor of people.
- Most importantly, God added to their number —people were saved.

For this writer this is the crux of prophetic preaching – the saving of souls. The Spirit empowers speech for the purpose of proclamation. Early Christians had a message, an announcement, and a proclamation to make as they preached the kerygma.³¹ As the proclamation went forth and there was a sense that a formal word was being spoken for God, Christian communities were connected by their response to the proclaimed word. Theologically, it is as the gospel is proclaimed that its fullness and power emerges, for “as concerns its essence the gospel is kerygma, message and appeal in one (2 Corinthians 5:20). Therefore it must be proclaimed over and over again, and in that act it becomes what it is and wants to be.” As Otto Weber in his *Foundations of Dogmatics*: “The Spirit operates to empower speech in proclamation so that the reality of the Christian gospel can break loose in the world, for the “validity of the scriptural Word requires the “living voice of the Gospel’ (viva vox evangelii).³²

Present –day proclamation is not a continuation of the Word passed on in Scripture, and it certainly is not its expansion. It actualizes the Word, which has already been spoken and heard, and makes room for

³¹Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, *Preaching As a Theological Task* (Louisville: John Knox Press), 126.

³² Ibid, 127.

it in us. That means the Word is show again to be relevant in proclamation.³³

Theological Foundation

Prophetic preaching seeks to bring about change in not only the individual but the community of faith. The prophet Amos is eloquent in explaining authentic preaching which is oriented toward transformation. Amos writes “Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.”³⁴ Justice and righteousness constitute the heart of the prophets preaching and in order for black preachers to make a difference in the condition of life in America, their messages needs to be laden with themes of freedom and justice.³⁵ This message of justice and righteousness speaks to the theology of not only the black church, but the church as it seeks to speak prophetically such that spiritual transformation is inherent in the culture.

Peter, in the book of Acts, preaches a message of hope and liberation, received by the crowds listening. This same Peter who denied Jesus and was fearful the night of Jesus’ trial, is now the one preaching a message of hope and liberation. Peter speaks boldly to a captivated audience. The gospel Word is accompanied by God’s spirit as an effecting agent (Acts 4:31). The Spirit makes it operative. The Holy Spirit empowers preached speech to enable it to accomplish God’s purposes. There can be a fundamental theological courage in preaching. The “presence of the Word,” God’s Word in Jesus

³³ Ibid, 127.

³⁴ Amos 5:23-24.

³⁵ James H. Harris *Pastoral Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 91.

Christ as know through scripture, is real when human language and speech is used for communicating the gospel message.³⁶

For the prophet to thrive and transformation to take place in God's people, there must be a liberating theology that informs the church. The style and form of worship and study should seek to please God, but have such an impact that the sermon not only causes the shout but also addresses the needs and situations of God's people for a particular time. James H. Harris in *Pastoral Theology* states that we must recapture the spirit of prophecy that gripped biblical leaders such as Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah and compelled the to speak harshly to people who felt they were doing well and should be applauded for their support of the temple shrines and status quo. Harris captures the spirit of the prophetic word which when delivered, even challenges the theology of the believer. No longer can we rest upon the beliefs of our mothers and fathers and grandparents. Rather it should invoke a desire to foster change. Prophetic preaching is liberating and provides a theology which is the fruit of life in community, of shared faith, and of multiple efforts, and should be acknowledged and encouraged as such, as a shared responsibility of all spirit-filled human community.³⁷

Prophetic preaching is also narrative in that it one can see threads of the story of the lives of God's people and how God intervened. Narrative theology dominates the scriptures. As one reads the Bible he or she discovers that the Bible is a record of stories about God. The Old Testament could be said to be dominated by the telling and retelling of the story of how God led Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, and all that this

³⁶Ibid, 125.

³⁷ Donald W. Musser & Joseph L. Price, *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 288.

implies for the people of God. The New Testament is also dominated by the story of God's redeeming action in history, this centering on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.³⁸

For this writer, the project caused moments of self-reflection about the complacent posture one sometimes takes when the preached word is viewed from a business as usual perspective. The reign of God and the way of God must be central to the message of the prophet. When the prophetic is introduced, this writer believes it forces not only the prophet, but also the believer to a place of self-examination and challenges one's belief system. It is in these moments a theology is formed and one begins to address belief systems, no longer living off of what has been taught, rather what is experienced in life. Theology is discourse about God's word. It is reflection upon the God whom Christians worship and adore.³⁹

The theology of the prophetic word of God is essentially the liberating message of God's intervening in the lives of His people. In the book of Amos, this word reflects a message of God's disappointment with a disobedient people and a message of judgment delivered by the Prophet. This writer believes as Edward Farley writes about the power of God, that his word is not primarily proclaiming the word of God in an absolute way, but opening the text and helping people discover the power of God's love in the moves and structures of the text.⁴⁰

³⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 200.

³⁹ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁰ Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, *Preaching As a Theological Task* (Louisville: John Knox Press), 125.

Donald K. McKim in an essay entitled “The Gospel as Empowered Speech for Proclamation and Persuasion,” posits that to realize theological courage belongs to the essence of the gospel as empowered speech can make every preaching event momentous. It is not that fireworks, conversions or outwardly visible results should occur. But the theological courage and confidence, he believes, belongs to the view of the gospel and is the conviction that all results belong to the work of God’s spirit.⁴¹ In this, McKim implies that we must not only hear, but have the courage to allow the spirit to work in and through the hearer such that a theology, a belief system emerges, but more importantly there is a clearer understand of who God is in the life of the believer.

Prophetic Preaching as a Means of Spiritual Growth

The historical context of the prophetic message is the history of the people of Israel from the last decades of the Northern Kingdom (750—722 BE), through the Babylonian exile of the kingdom Judah (598-538) and the restoration of the Jerusalem cultic community (ca.520-200), to the reform of Ezra (ca.400).⁴² While there is no clear model of prophetic preaching as a measurable spiritual growth model, there are countless instances of the prophet speaking and transformation taking place in the lives the lives of God’s people. Early prophetic writings are said to be more consistent than latter writings which are more fragmented. As a result, writings from the prophets can serve as an

⁴¹ Donald McKim, “The Gospel as Empowered Speech for Proclamation and Persuasion,” in *Preaching As a Theological Task*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville: John Knox Press), 129.

⁴² James M. Ward, *Thus Says the Lord: The Message of the Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 18.

approximate indication of historical context.⁴³ Growth was not due to a model in place, but rather a community lifestyle which yielded spiritual growth.

Many books and models address the spiritual growth and development of a people. Because the masses of worshipers attend Sunday morning worship services rather than the traditional mid-week bible study or worship experience, this writer believes that the Sunday morning hour provides a unique opportunity for the preacher, through the proclaimed word, to change the hearts of believers. While some would argue that this hour does not provide enough time to effect change in the life of the believer, a good case can be made to show that preaching has been the primary source of spiritual growth, particularly in the black church. Carlyle Fielding Stewart III in *Growing the African American Church through worship and Preaching*, shared that the change in the preaching style and the change in the Music style at the Trinity United church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, caused the church to grow from 87 adult members to 8,500⁴⁴ active members. True spiritual growth is born out of the ingesting of God's word such that it evokes a sense of responsibility and accountability where growth is inevitable. This is prophetic preaching – the saturating of one's spirit with the word of God such that spiritual growth cannot be hindered.

Spiritual growth models have been developed to reach various ages, genders, lifestyles and denominations. Carlyle Fielding's model for church growth suggests the following components must be present for growth to take place: 1) Evangelism; 2)

⁴³ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁴ Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, *Growing The African American Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 73.

Preaching and Worship; 3) Community Outreach and 4) Spiritual Formation.⁴⁵

Fielding's model offers for this writer the importance of the preached word in the spiritual development and growth of the listener. While Fielding does not deal specifically with the prophetic word, it is clear from his model that preaching is a necessary component in order for spiritual growth to take place. Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro offer this writer a different model of spiritual growth. In *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church From the Inside Out*, Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro propose that transformation occurs as a result of a clear understanding of the church culture and making adjustments as a result of knowing this culture. These writers believe that if you can change a church's culture, you can change everything. Their position is that a church's context is one of a kind. The language needed to verbalize and live out the gospel has certain nuances particular to each church alone. So our greatest challenge as leaders is to unlearn any inappropriate preconceptions and develop a culture that best models the maturity of what it means to be in Christ.⁴⁶

Marvin McMickle in *Living Water for Thirsty Souls* captures the passion of this writer in a quote from the article, *Crisis Preaching in the 70s*, written by Merrill Abbey in which he writes: "Preachers need to make regular use of prophetic texts, and they need to allow the function of the text to become the function of the sermon."⁴⁷ This writer believes that Abbey's inference here is to use the prophetic text as it was intended when written, to serve as a catalyst for spiritual transformation and growth. The

⁴⁵ Ibid, 73.

⁴⁶ Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church From the Inside Out* (San Francisco, CA: Josey Bass, 2005), 24.

⁴⁷ Marvin A. McMickle, *Living Water for Thirsty Souls: Unleashing the Power of Exegetical Preaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 56.

responsibility of the prophetic preaching is to speak the word of God such that the hearer responds in obedience to God's will. McMickle also quotes Elizabeth Achtemeier from *Preaching from the Old Testament* by defining Prophetic Preaching this way: "Prophetic preaching is when the preacher seeks to bring the will of God to the attention of the people of God, and then challenges them to "trust their Lord in all circumstances and to obey him with willing hearts."⁴⁸ As the prophet speaks this type of truth, consistently and with passion, this writer suggests that spiritual growth and development will take place. It is not necessarily the utilization of a prophetic text that will yield a prophetic community and spiritual growth. Rather it is the sense of urgency, and the commands of God inherent in the sermon that motivate the hearer and propels them to action. It is voice of God through the prophet that should beg the hearer to answer the questions "what does this mean for me? How shall I respond?

Dr. James Harris in *Pastoral Theology: A Black Perspective* believes that worship, apart from addressing issues of fairness and goodness, is nothing more than a meaningless exercise in expedience and self-indulgence that does not please God. According to Harris, we need to recapture the spirit of prophecy that gripped biblical leaders such as Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and compelled them to speak harshly to a people who felt they were doing well and should be applauded for their support for the temple shrines and the status quo.⁴⁹ This writer concurs with Harris, and senses a felt-need for the church to immerse itself in the prophetic word of God that compels the

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 107; quoted in Marvin A. McMickle, *Living Water for Thirsty Souls: Unleashing the Power of Exegetical Preaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001)

⁴⁹ James H. Harris, *Pastoral Theology: A Black-Church Prospective* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 91.

preacher to preach, but that also compels the hearer to take some action to move towards the God-given mandate from the prophet. The prophet must be passionate about delivering a fresh message from God such that the listener has no other option but to act at the behest of God through the prophet. The prophet must become the very voice of God for the people. As the prophet lives out this calling, this writer believes that the response will follow which is “true preaching.

In *Where Have all the Prophets Gone?*, Marvin A. McMickle suggests that Prophetic Preaching in the American Pulpit has suffered a decline in the last 20-25 years. McMickle posits that this decline has resulted from a number of reasons, to include an overzealous preoccupation with praise and worship and a focus on prosperity and personal enrichment themes.⁵⁰ McMickle in an article on prophetic preaching in the 21st Century writes that rather than being text driven, prophetic preaching should focus our attention on the core prophetic emphasis that no matter how much religious ritual God’s people engage in, it would not be pleasing to God if those religious observances do not lead or result in the work of justice and righteousness.⁵¹

J. Alfred Smith in *Growing the African American Church* suggests that preachers must have music in their souls to transport gospel melodies to a culture controlled by the noise of discord and dissonance.⁵² Smith’s point is that we must preach such that listeners hear with the eyes of their soul as was done in ancient times. This hearing of the

⁵⁰ Marvin McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 8.

⁵¹ Marvin McMickle, "Prophetic Preaching in the 21st Century: It is Not Just About the Words," *The African American Pulpit Journal*/11, no. 4 (2008): 16.

⁵² J. Alfred Smith, *Growing the African American Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 49.

soul is what this writer believes propels the listener to a place of acting on the prophetic word of God.

Dr. James H. Harris in *Pastoral Theology* writes that the preacher is compelled to say something that addresses the needs of the people, directing the message to their heart and head. This wholistic message, Harris believes, will teach blacks how to live as Christians and how to relate their religion to freedom practices. This preaching he suggests, “in demonstration of the spirit and of power” must speak to the total condition of the Black community.⁵³ While Harris writes this in the context of the black church providing a message of liberation, this writer believes this is very much a desired outcome of the prophetic word of God. Not only is the preacher compelled to deliver the word, but the hearer senses a responsibility to act on the words of the prophet.

Samuel D. Proctor captures so well the mandate of the prophet when he writes that the preacher’s assignment is to set out to show that human nature can be renewed. According to Proctor, one of the finest opportunities that the preacher has from the pulpit is to confront all persons with the possibilities for renewal and restoration, to begin where they are...helping them find the freedom to center on Christ and experience spiritual and moral wholeness.⁵⁴

In *Blow the Trumpet in Zion*, Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. writes about “The Prophetic Imperative. Hendricks writes that if we are going to follow the example of Jesus, we have a responsibility to be prophets and to be prophetic. The prophetic imperative he says is ours and we must live it out first. For if we speak prophetically

⁵³ James H. Harris, *Pastoral Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress), 99.

⁵⁴ Samuel D. Proctor, *How Shall They Hear?* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1992), 37.

often and energetically enough, its going to make a difference.⁵⁵ This writer concurs. At the core of Hendricks statement is part of the premise of this writing. The prophetic word must be spoken often and energetically. It is this writer's position that Hendricks uses energetically in the sense that we must believe and live out the spoken word in order to encourage transformation in the life of the hearer. This responsibility is not only to be prophets but to prophetic in the words we deliver. To carry the name prophet implies that the word is carried by the messenger. To be prophetic is to speak this life giving word to the believer such that there is a compelling desire and need for transformation.

Lora-Ellen McKinney in *A View from the Pew* captures this mandate so well when she quotes St. Francis Assisi: "It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."⁵⁶ The prophet cannot be prophetic unless he or she understands what it means to take responsibility for the content of the word such that its value is not in the emotional way in which it is delivered, rather in the relevant connection to issues which are transforming to the listener.

Steven J. Lawson records it best in *Famine in the Land*: "The true idea of preaching is that the preacher should become the mouthpiece for his text, opening it up and applying it as a word from God to his hearers, talking only in order that the text itself may speak and be heard. It is the man of God opening the word of God and expounding its truths so that the voice of God may be heard, the glory of God seen, and the will of God obeyed." It is the obeying of God's will that this writer views as the result of the prophetic word of God going forth. This writer believes that only when the church

⁵⁵ Iva E. Carruthers, Frederick D. Haynes III, and Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., *Blow the Trumpet in Zion*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 83.

⁵⁶ Lora-Ellen McKinney, *A View From the Pew* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2004), 8.

recognizes the prophet as the very mouthpiece of God, the true voice of God, does true transformation occur and obedience to God's will begin.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land*.(Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), 12.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

William D. Watley, pastor and theologian, suggests that all believers are not satisfied with status quo spirituality. It is this premise that drives the project of this writer to seek a more systematic approach to spiritual growth and development. Watley writes: “A vision for growth is the reason behind our having a variety of choirs who sing a variety of music. A vision for growth is the reason a part of the worship services is called the ‘An invitation to Christian Discipleship.’ A vision for growth ought to be what brings us to church. We ought to be coming to church because we are not satisfied with where we are, because we realize we are a work in progress.”¹

It is this writer’s position that the methodology used for this project reflects a goal of moving parishioners from the current spiritual level to a deeper relationship in God. In order for spiritual growth and development to take place, the writer hypothesized if structured opportunities were available for the parishioner to ingest the word of God through sermon, bible study and bulletins, then spiritual growth would take place. The writer further hypothesized that varied communication mediums would encourage the hearers of the word to make application to daily life thereby impacting spiritual growth.

The writer proposed implementing the project in phases which included: 1) a focus group discussion in which the writer sampled a group to ascertain challenges and

¹William D. Watley, *God Wants You to Grow!: How to Live Beyond Your Limitations* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 4.

barriers to spiritual growth and development as it related to the present preaching and teaching system 2) a series of Sermons; 3) bible study (to include small group studies), and 4) bulletin education.

Phase I had as its goal to explore, through the focus group, the existing models in process that aided in spiritual growth. The writer desired to ascertain attendance and participation in ministry activities outside of Sunday and have a base from which to start. The writer hypothesized that if the implementation of a model of preaching (where sermons were designed to encourage changed behavior), teaching and bulletin education would be reflected in attendance, giving and ministry engagement. The writer chose focus groups as a way of including persons in various age groups, membership tenure, gender, marital status as a way to include a cross-section of the congregation in the study and research. The writer believed the importance of being inclusive when gathering data for the project. Inclusiveness means including everyone, not excluding anyone. People are different, hold different values and come from different backgrounds. They sometimes see things differently than the researcher.²

Phase II was to utilize sermons designed by the Pastors to increase the levels of stewardship. This writer defined prophetic preaching as messages which spoke life into the believer such that some level of growth occurred when the believer took positive action as a result of hearing the sermon. This writer was interested in prophetic preaching which focused on a model clearly outlining the necessary steps for growth in the believer's spiritual life. This writer believed that if the writer's model was in place to complement the preached moment, then spiritual growth would have taken place.

² Ibid, 41.

As the core study of the project was prophetic preaching as a model for spiritual growth, the writer proposed utilizing sermons preached Sunday as well as the primary tool in determining growth of the congregation. Because of the model of ministry in place at the First Baptist Church of South Richmond, the writer would utilize sermons from Pastors and one delivered by the writer to test the hypothesis. It was the writer's belief that the sermonic moment when coordinated with education and development would yield a spiritually mature congregation that the writer considers "prophetic community."

The writer also proposed utilizing bulletin education to reinforce sermons and study opportunities. The writer proposed this devotional type writing that would further enhance biblical principles and further provide additional methods of enhancing spiritual growth.

Finally, since the only bible study opportunities currently in place were the Tuesday night mid-week study and the Sunday morning Spiritual Development Classes (Sunday School) as we know it, the writer proposed to seed small group studies to provide participants other opportunities to engage in the study of God's word during the test period.

The writer's belief was that a structured system of preaching and educational opportunities would yield a spiritually maturing people. In other words if the preached moment, and the study of God's word were somehow connected; this coupled with bulletin education and a system of nurturing, some level of spiritual growth would emerge.

Engaging members of the congregation in a systematic method of spiritual growth appeared to be a very simple task when reflected upon by the writer. However developing

a system whereby the writer's hypothesis could be tested and accurate data recorded appeared to be more of a challenge. To set up a system in which the writer could follow the test group seemed almost too large of a challenge as the writer assessed the church's current landscape. However, to test the hypothesis, this writer used qualitative and quantitative research.

The writer believed that some pre-test data would be necessary. The writer's desire was to gain a "holistic" view of the preaching and teaching model of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond. According to Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman, qualitative research conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a "field" is reflective of everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organizations.³ This writer attempted to capture data in the context to adequately understand parishioners' current use of methods in place at the church and what would occur when new methods were employed to enhance spiritual growth. To test the hypothesis, the writer used the following model:

- 1) Focus Group of members of the Sanctuary Choir of the church which reflected a good cross-section of the church's make-up.
- 2) Sermons
- 3) Bulletin – Education (The Stewardship Corner)
- 4) Small Group Studies

The writer wanted to try to gain an adequate understanding of how the present system of preaching and teaching impacted members of the congregation. The writer believed that the focus group would provide the necessary base data to begin the project.

³ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 6.

The writer's goal was to first, extract from the information received from the focus group— current participation and engagement in ministry opportunities outside of Sunday morning. Secondly, the writer felt a focus group dialogue with this group of congregants would provide the necessary basis to examine the presumed effectiveness of preaching in terms of moving persons to new levels of spiritual growth at the First Baptist Church of South Richmond. The writer also believed that this group would provide base data to determine participation outside of services on Sunday morning. The process used for the focus group:

- 1) Schedule Focus Group Session
- 2) Construct List of Questions for Focus Group
- 3) Conduct Focus Group
- 4) Summarize Findings

The writer invited a group from the Sanctuary Choir, the primary choir of the church to represent the congregation in a focus group setting. The group was chosen because of the diversity of age, education, gender, marital status, and perceived spiritual maturity, etc., which the writer felt would provide an adequate cross section of the congregation.

The writer used action research to discover current trends in spiritual growth and the impact of the sermon on the growth of the congregation. According to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead in *You and Your Research Project*, research demands that you work with others. You are doing your research into your practice, but your practice is about how you are with others, and is carried out in company with others.⁴

⁴ Jean McNiff, Pamela Lomax and Jack White, *You and Your Action Research Project* (London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer), 40.

The writer proposed a four-week test period in which the sermon coupled with the bible study would serve to strengthen the spiritual life of the believer. In addition, the writer implemented a small group study to determine if continued reinforcement of the Word of God would yield a more engaged congregation. This writer believed that the growth would be reflected in the attendance at worship services, increased giving and a growth in the number of persons attending mid-week study opportunities. This writer hypothesized that a systematic approach would also increase the number of persons engaged in other ministry opportunities at the church. A formal process was not put in place to capture all of the data from this hypothesis. Even though a formal process was not in place to capture all of the data, membership and ministry activity, giving patterns and history were available through the church's membership management system, ACS and reviewed during project implementation.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

The purpose of this project was to determine if spiritual growth and development of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond was directly impacted by the preached word and other educational methods. The goal of the research project was to utilize findings from this project to move the congregation to a systematic model of preaching and educational opportunities to increase spiritual growth and development and participation in ministry activities.

The First Baptist Church of South Richmond has enjoyed a long history of having a strong preaching and Christian education ministry. In recent years, there had been a decline in attendance and the congregation's engagement in activities outside of Sunday morning. This writer believed that persons were challenged not only by time, but also a sense of "What does the word of God mean for me today? What would God have me do in response to the word?"

In its current setting, the church was not utilizing a systematic method of preaching. While there were series scheduled from time to time, sermon topics and focus were generally designed to edify the body, deal with current challenges the Pastors discerned the church might be facing. Also the writer believes that the Pastors' relationships with the membership naturally resulted in a certain level of spiritual discernment about concerns of the parish.

The Sunday morning preaching is shared by the Senior Pastor and Pastor of the church and other senior staff members as necessary. The church has always been known for developing strong preachers and a standard of utilizing trained staff for preaching and teaching. The church holds three services: 8:00 a.m. Early Morning Worship; 9:30 a.m. Empowerment Hour, at a different site in the county; and the 11:00 a.m. Morning Worship. The 8:00 a.m. service is generally attended by persons who desire a focused worship experience and who generally attend only one service; the 9:30 a.m. worship service is attended primarily by a younger group of members who desire a more liberating service and who the church has discovered, are not as engaged as members attending other services. The 11:00 a.m. worship service is a mixed service, but is the largest service and is attended by a more diverse group: young and old as well as members who have been in church one week to those who have attended for 60 or more years. This service is a reflection of the traditional mixed with the contemporary and truly reflects a tenet of the church: “an old church with a new vision; contemporary, but not compromised.”

Educational opportunities take place primarily on Sunday mornings (church school and small groups, which have evolved since the project’s inception) and Tuesday evening youth and adult, weekly bible studies. Just this past year, the church branded its weekly bible study, G.R.O.W. Tuesdays focusing on, **G**rowth, **R**eference, **O**bedience and **W**orship.

As the core study of the project was prophetic preaching as a model for spiritual growth, the writer proposed utilizing sermons preached Sunday as well as the primary tool in determining growth of the congregation. Because of the model of ministry in place

at the First Baptist Church of South Richmond, the writer would utilize sermons from Pastors and one delivered by the writer to test the hypothesis. It was the writer's belief that the sermonic moment when coordinated with education and development would yield a spiritually mature congregation that the writer considers a "prophetic community." The writer also proposed utilizing bulletin education to reinforce sermons and study opportunities. The writer proposed a devotional type writing that would further enhance biblical principles and further provide additional methods of enhancing spiritual growth.

Finally, since the only bible study opportunities currently in place were the Tuesday night mid-week study and the Sunday morning Spiritual Development Classes (Sunday School), the writer proposed to seed small group studies to provide participants other opportunities to engage in the study of God's word during the test period.

For the focus session, participants were asked a series of questions and asked to participate in an honest dialogue about challenges faced when seeking a deepened relationship with God evidenced by participation in Sunday worship experiences as well as opportunities outside of Sunday morning services.

The Sermon

The sermons utilized during the test period focused on stewardship. Often stewardship is equated with giving. However, the church was at a place in its ministry, in which it needed more hands to do work of the community of faith. The focus of sermons was designed to move persons from the crowd to the core and from existing to experiencing God in a new way. In a very real sense, our motto could have been extracted

from Luke 6:38, “Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” The goal is since the church has for many years operated under a theme of a “teaching, tithing church” in terms of its stewardship, the writer chose to track attendance, engagement in ministry and small groups. What is interesting to note is that people do want to be instructed and disciplined in their spiritual walk. While this was not part of the project, this was an added discovery which was unveiled during the field experience.

What the writer discovered during this time period was there was some positive response to the preached word. This is reflected in the offering records which indicate a consist increase in the tithing pool. Another interesting factor is fact that overall giving remained stable during a very tough economic period. In addition, the church had a special Capital Campaign, Season of Change, which reflected a significant increase in giving as well as new pledge commitments made to the campaign.

Katie Canon in *Teaching Preaching* defines preaching as a divine activity wherein the Word of God is proclaimed or announced on contemporary issues for an ultimate response from God.¹ It is the proclamation or the announcement that Canon speaks of, that this writer believes must be present for the sermon to be an effective part of the spiritual growth and development of a people. While the number of new members was not part of the writer’s expected outcomes, it is important to note the church grew numerically during the test period, averaging 3-5 persons uniting with the church each Sunday. This growth is reflective of all three services and represents an average. There

¹Katie Geneva Cannon, *Teaching Preaching* (Lexington, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2002), 32.

were some Sundays in which the church experienced 8-10 new members uniting with the congregation. This is evidenced by the responses of the new members when they have been counseled and processed into the church. Most often it was the message that spoke to a specific circumstance which served as the catalyst to move the believer to unite with the church. This writer believes that there is a direct relationship between the word of God delivered by the preacher (using varied mediums – preached, taught, bulletin education) and the response of the listener as a result of hearing the word of God.

A sample sermon has been included in the appendices. As well, samples of bulletin education and other supporting documents. Unfortunately, the project test period did not allow enough time to fully test the effects of the sermon on the hearer. However, it is clear from attendance at worship and study opportunities that some growth occurred during the test period. In addition, the church continues to grow and has experienced a surge of growth in attendance at events and in giving (which this writer believes has been impacted by the bulletin education instituted each Sunday). The successful outcomes experienced, the writer believes, has direct relationship to the intentional instruction provided in the sermon, the study opportunities and bulletin education.

The researcher requested members from the congregation's largest choir, the Sanctuary Choir, participate in a focus group discussion on spiritual growth and development. The researcher believed this group provided a good representation of the congregation as it is a diverse group in age, gender and congregational membership. Membership tenure ranged from less than one year to more than 50 years. The focus discussion was generated by a list of questions developed by the researcher which were designed to gather information critical to the project. Participants were asked to be a part

of the group and instructed that participation was not mandatory. About 40 members of the group agreed to be part of the focus session. Participants were given guidelines for participating in the focus group:

1. Participation in the group was voluntary.
2. Information gained would be used solely for the purposes of this project:
Prophetic Preaching as a Model for Spiritual Growth.
3. There were no right or wrong responses, but the researcher was seeking to gain a baseline to measure growth and development of the participants.
4. Names would not be used only the information gathered to aide in setting the baseline for measuring progress in the project.

The focus group session was held immediately following the Sunday morning worship experience on October 26, 2010. The researcher believed that the sermonic moment would be fresh on the minds of the participants and that the participants would be available to address questions directly related to the preached moment and its impact in their spiritual growth

The focus group session was designed to last approximately forty-five minutes. The researcher attempted to provide an open platform to get a sense of whether participants believed that they were growing spiritually and how they saw themselves growing spiritually and developing as a result of hearing the preached word.

About 25% of the group stated they were consistently engaged in a ministry teaching context outside of Sunday morning that aided in their growth and development. The majority of the group however, admitted that they were challenged by the additional time necessary and that Sunday morning tended to be the time that they gained their

greatest spiritual knowledge. About 5% of the group had engaged in small group opportunities to learn, while others were not clear about what the small group ministry entailed. They had heard it explained from the pulpit but had not actively sought this as a meaningful spiritual growth opportunity.

When asked about their stewardship and whether they were committed to the tithe, most indicated they were tithing, but admitted that they were not always consistent with their giving. Many reasons were given, challenging economic times, job layoffs and for many a lack of commitment to the tithe. The writer discovered several very revealing concerns from the participants in the focus group. First, the group as a whole was concerned about the demands of ministry and felt that their personal life schedules often conflicted with the scheduled study times. Many participants felt there were not enough opportunities outside of Sunday worship and mid-week study for congregants to engage in the study of the word of God. The group also admitted that when other opportunities for study were presented that they had not taken advantage of these sessions. Most felt that while the preached word on Sunday was meaningful and strong, and that they were very satisfied with the preaching, they felt that they might grow more if a systematic program of sermon, study and education was implemented. They also expressed a need for online and study or some other approach outside of traditional current methods to deepen their biblical knowledge. Most of the group admitted that time was such an issue that outside of committed ministry events, they did not engage in other spiritual growth opportunities.

The writer believed that the addition of small group studies would further enhance the study the spiritual growth and development of the church while providing an

opportunity for members of the congregation to be nurtured and feel a sense of belonging.

The participants were invited to be a part of a focus group session. Since the writer wanted a cross section of the membership, no attempt was made to personally select persons to share in the research. The writer's only requirement was that participants be honest in the sharing their observations, concerns and needs as it related to their own spiritual growth.

The writer shared the preaching model currently in use so that the participants might contrast the goal of the project with what they were accustomed to experiencing. Several questions were posed to the group. The writer's intent was to use this time to discover more about the participants' engagement in the life and ministry of the First Baptist Church of South Richmond. In addition, the writer wanted to get a sense of what the concerns were that kept persons from actively engaging in spiritual growth opportunities and what challenges the group felt they faced in trying to become a more spiritually mature people. This information was necessary to have a starting point from which to test.

During the test period a series of sermons were preached by; coupled with complementing mid-week bible study. In addition the researcher developed a bulletin education insert, "The Stewardship Corner" which highlighted a stewardship text, but designed to reinforce the message for the week. To provide another opportunity for study, the researcher worked with a team of persons to re-start the church's small group ministry. The desire was that the small group setting would provide another study, worship and fellowship opportunity to further aide in the spiritual growth and

development of the congregation. This researcher hypothesized that the sermon, bible study, engagement in a small group and bulletin education would yield growth numerically in ministry events outside of Sunday. Further, the researcher believed that growth would also be reflected in giving each Sunday and attendance at ministry activities (bible study, evening services, etc.) outside of Sunday morning. While participants felt that the sermonic moments were beneficial, there appeared to be apathy towards committing additional time outside of the Sunday morning hour for personal growth and development.

When asked to expound on this, participants indicated a challenge with time, time management and the ability to commit an additional time for weekly study outside of Sunday morning. Furthermore, participants expressed a desire to see more options for study outside of the traditional mid-week study hour.

The writer was pleasantly surprised by the liberating atmosphere present in the focus group sessions. Participants seemed not only willing to share, but expressed a sincere desire to be lead to a deeper level of spiritual growth and development.

The Bulletin Education

Part of the project application included the use of a bi-weekly bulletin insert, “The Stewardship Corner.” This educational component was designed to be a sermon in a “nutshell” and to reinforce stewardship principles. While there is no hard data to support the benefits of this additional educational medium, the writer believes it served to strengthen the prophetic word of the preacher. The tool was portable and easy to share with others because of the form in which it was created. Participants found this helpful

and because it could be posted, they found they were able to reference the document and often times used it to memorize the scripture focus of the week. Sample copies of this document are part of the appendices. Participants were provided a text and in most case two to three tips to grow in their stewardship. Again, this writer cannot make a direct correlation between giving and the “Stewardship Corner” bulletin education; however there is evidence of financial stabilization and growth in the number of persons participating in the tithing community.

Small Groups

The final tool utilized during the period was the development of small groups to provide nurture and care as members of the congregation grew spiritually as a result of the prophetic word and the additional tools implemented for growth. Small groups are defined as a tool to create community which meets a basic human need that neither the interaction of the workplace nor the neighborhood can fully meet.² Many larger congregations utilize this ministry model for church growth. However, this writer saw the implementation of small groups during this period as another opportunity to create prophetic community. Corine Ware who authored the book *Connecting to God* sees the Small Group model as a way to nurture the spirituality of the congregation. Ware’s position is that we must help people pay attention to God. She posits what that the church through small groups:

² Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh, *Creating Community: Deeper Fellowship through Small Group Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 28.

- Can help people create settings for seeking God, staying open to God, and being accountable to God.
- Can practice the spiritual disciplines that become means of graces as they help us be open to God.
- Can center on God and discover power and energy for being the people of God.³

The writer believes that there is added value when spiritual formation opportunities are present when one seeks to develop the congregations.

To complement this study, three small groups were set up at the Hull Street location and one small group was set up at the Ironbridge location. Guidelines were established for the small groups and administrative tools put in place to track not only numeric growth, but spiritual growth. Studies were provided during the initial phase to insure consistency in implementation. Group leaders were asked to remain true to the guidelines of the small groups so that integrity would be maintained in assessing how successful the model was for the church. Groups were asked to attend regular training sessions and to commit to weekly reports. They were also asked to always maintain an open chair for evangelistic purposes (to recruit new members into the small group ministry), to always have a leader in training to start another group and most importantly to agree to split once the group reached 12 members.

Since its inception, the group of three has multiplied to twenty-one groups and the group of three at our temporary location has grown to five. The implementation of this

³ Corine Ware, *Connecting to God: Nurturing Spirituality through Small Groups* (Herndon: The Alban Institute), 7-8.

model has proven quite successful to the project and has had a great impact on the spiritual life, connected spirit and growth of the church.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS AND SUMMARY

The First Baptist Church of South Richmond already maintains a spirit of prophetic community. While this project sought to further enhance the prophetic voice of the church and impact spiritual growth and development, the writer has to first acknowledge that the church has always been a prophetic voice, not only through its preaching, but also through its many social action endeavors. The vision of the church is to be a theologically anchored and socially responsible community in which we grow disciples. Our goal is to multiply such that we saturate the greater community with ambassadors for God who are dispatched to the greater community.

An issue for this writer was why the weekly study and ministry opportunities did not reflect the community present on Sunday mornings for worship. What has emerged as a result of focused efforts to educate the congregation is a sense in which there has been positive response to the model.

One of the tools used to measure this is a weekly attendance record at all services. While impacted by inclement weather and other impacting events, the record indicates there was some growth in attendance. While the project was not long enough to fully determine the larger impact on the church, there are very positive signs present. According to financial records, the tithing pool has increased and people seem very responsive to the Stewardship Corner developed to provide a stewardship educational

moment on Sunday mornings. Not only is the scripture text shared, but tips for growth. What resulted is a willingness among several members of the congregation to begin consistently giving either through the tithe or regular offering. Observations reveal a sense in which persons want to be disciplined in their Christian walk. Hence, as the prophet speaks the word of God and gives instruction on what needs to occur, it appears that there are those who are heeding to the word of God. Those who were not part of the tithing pool or consistently giving to the ministry of the church are now moving towards consistent giving based on the Word of God. There has been no pushing nor prodding, only a systematic approaching of providing a complement of the preached word with various educational opportunities to reinforce the message from the Lord.

The writer is continuing to move forward with focused studies which complement the prophetic message of the preached word and continues to seek avenues of education to enhance the voice of the preacher. In order to realize the full extent of the project, more time is needed to study the congregation and engage the congregation in further spiritual growth and development opportunities.

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself and share how long you have been a part of the fellowship of First Baptist.
2. What is marital status? Do you have children?
3. What ministries are you engaged in?
4. What strikes you the most about the preached word on Sunday morning?
What are your likes? Your dislikes?
5. As a result of the preached word, are do you sense an urging to attend mid-week bible or other study opportunities?
6. Are you engaged in worship service opportunities outside of Sunday morning? Why? Why Not?
7. Do you attend now? Why or why not?
8. What recommendations would you suggest to aid you in growing in your spiritual life?
9. Is there any other information you wish to share?
10. Any additional comments?

APPENDIX B

SERMON

A Word to the Wise
1 Chronicles 7:11-17

My charge from God today is not to scare straight. But rather it is to issue a word to the wise. It is to provide a reminder to us of our obligation to turn our agendas, our joys, our sorrows, our ways, our belongings to God. There's a sense of restlessness and uncertainty in the world we live in today. We are witnessing and experiencing things we have never seen before:

The World in recent days has faced:

- Tsunami's
- Cyclones in
- Earthquakes
- Floods in
- Fires in

These United States has faced

- Floods in the Midwest
- Teen's making pacts to get pregnant
- Gas at an all time high
- House Foreclosures in record number

As a preacher of God's Gospel I'm concerned. I'm concerned because we are facing as a people more challenges than we have every faced:

- The economy is going south...
- Folks set to retire can't retire because investments aren't worth much

- Gas is \$4.00 a gallon/and I'm not sure how the working poor are making it.
- Food costs more, and if you haven't noticed we are paying more for smaller packaging

We need something that would hold us when the storms of life are raging. When a changing world presents uncertain time, we need the rest and the surety of a God who is able to provide everything we stand in need of -- A God who neither slumbers nor sleeps. A God who as Moses said is the "I Am that I am." This means that you can't reduce him, you can't box him in, but he is the great I Am.

So I'm here today with a word to the wise from the Lord. It is a call and a challenge to every one of us to return to God -- to revive our relationship with the master.

Our text is familiar to many and is often used when we are faced with challenges in life and sometimes the church. But it is a powerful promise from God that follows a heart-felt prayer by King Solomon in Chapter six. I want to encourage you to read this in your spare time. King Solomon's willingness and almost begging of God to hear the prayers and needs of flawed people yielded a wonderful promise from God. Eleven times in chapter six, he asks God to hear the prayers of his people. And so we see today that we end up with this wonderful promise from God in this 7th Chapter of 2nd Chronicles.. And when God makes a promise we can count on it. We can take it to the bank.

"If my people who are called by my name would humble themselves, seek my face and turn from their wicked ways...then will I hear from Heaven. It's a promise that God will hear us, but we have got to be wise and hear the words of almighty God."

Notice first that God didn't show up until Solomon had completed all he had intended to do in the temple and in his own residence. Look at verse 11 ...When Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord and the royal palace and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the Lord and in his own palace, the Lord appeared to him at night.

Now this is not the first time that God appears to Solomon at night. When Solomon asks the Lord for wisdom, God replies in the night. Isn't it interesting when we need something from the Lord that he shows up in the night time of our lives. Sometimes it is the night hour, but often it is when we are in the nights of life. Don't worry if you haven't been in a night time situation, hold on...for all of us are just a call away from the night, just coming out of the night or we are on our way into the night time of life. But God shows up in the night and it is only after King Solomon is finished with all he has planned to do. You see we have so many plans and things we intend to do in life for God and for ourselves. And sometimes, just sometimes, God has to let us go through our motions before he shows up and shows out – before he speaks. God has to sometimes allow us to accomplish all that we desire and think is important before he speaks. It was not until King Solomon had finished all he had planned to do...that God showed up and began to answer his prayers. That's a word to the wise. God is waiting for us to finish up all we intended and planned to do before he can give further instruction and answer our prayer. I believe it's just part of the journey.

And notice that God then begins to make the promise. He says I have heard your prayer and I have chosen the temple for sacrifices. But when I allow calamity to come upon the land, if my people who are called by name...

I want to put a plug there...We are called by the name of God.

Therefore there ought to be something different about us...Our actions, our spirits our works ought to ooze God. No one should have to ask if we are Christian because we are God's chosen people. We are a chosen people a royal priesthood...We carry the name of God...

Your name is important. When I got married I shared with my husband that I wanted to carry my maiden name. It was not because I didn't love the name Green. But the name Ivey, in Newport News, had become synonymous with words like: kind, smart, respectful, giving, and civic minded.

I remember as a child as I entered elementary school...and upon meeting my teachers they said you are an Ivey and I expect great things...You see there was legacy left behind by my brothers and sisters who had matriculated before me...So my teachers were not looking for any junk....When they heard Ivey...there was expectation...

- Likewise when you here Child of God, called by His name...
- It ought to be synonymous with a great God...
- It ought reflect a people of obedience...who understand the words of God...God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble
- A people who know that even though I walk through the valley of death I shall fear no evil...for you are with me...

- A people who walk in ...The Lord is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear...

Words of wisdom...You are called by the name of God

And then you've got to seek him...The text says that we are to humble ourselves, turn from their wicked ways and seek him... then ...

We've got to seek God...That means putting God first in everything...That means following the commandments of God...When you seek God you study the word of God. The bible becomes the road map to life. So your church life isn't reduced to showing up on Monday, but also to bible study on Wednesday, choir rehearsal on Thursday, to giving God your time your talent and your money. You got to seek him...

- The prophet Isaiah says it this way...Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake His way, and the unrighteous man His thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.
- Matthew – 7:7 Ask and it shall be given Seek and ye shall find, knock and the door shall be opened. We have not because we ask not.
- Matthew 6:33 – Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteous and all these things will be added unto you.

This means you're not always waiting for God to do something...But you've got to finding ways to experience him in every area of your life. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near. That means we have to find where God is working and begin working there. We've got to ask God what we ought to be doing. We've got to show up when God has work going on in the Kingdom...If my people who are called by my name, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways then shall I hear from heaven....

Finally, wisdom allows us to know that it's conditional. The statement is If my people....do these things then they will hear from heaven. In other words the promise can't be realized unless you willing to fulfill the *if*. The then will not materialize unless the then is fulfilled. Too many of us want to be blessed and live in abundance but we don't want to give to God as his word declares....

- Bring ye all the tithe into the storehouse of the Lord and prove me now herewith and see if I will not pour you out a blessing that you will not have room enough to receive...
- We want power of life...but we don't have a meaningful prayer life.

But the promise is conditional...If then...If then...

I said God how can I help us to understand this principle? The Lord reminded me of a wonderful example. Now I'm going to date myself...

But when I was growing up we were blessed by something called S&H Green Stamps...

Here's how the process worked...My parents would shop in the local grocery store.

In exchange for their purchase they would receive stamps that had to be placed in the S&H green stamp book. When the book was completed...they could look in the S&H catalog book and redeem the stamps for items in the catalog.

And so we would paste those stamps in the book and my Mom would look at the book

- She would decide what items she needed or wanted
- When she had enough books she would redeem them...
- The point...
- She couldn't redeem if she had not followed the process
- She couldn't redeem if she hadn't made an investment...
- She couldn't redeem if she didn't following the instructions!

We don't want to follow the instructions...

If my people who are called by my name would humble themselves, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways...

Then will I hear from heaven...I don't know about you but I need to hear from heaven

APPENDIX C

BIBLE STUDY

Eight Kingdom Principles of Sowing and Reaping

In regards to sowing and reaping, there are some things to consider.

1. The seed we plant is the same kind of seed we reap – seed of its kind.

One phenomenon of God's creation is that the seed we plant is from the fruit which was harvested. We see this in life. Parents often see in their children the characteristics of themselves, both good and bad. Each of us must set good examples, for life is spent planting. You have no choice but to sow.

2. We determine the size of the harvest at the time of planting (II Corinthians 9:6, 8, 11).

The farmer who plants hundreds or thousands of acres knows that, barring some natural disaster, he is going to reap more than he planted, but always in proportion to what he planted. One who is generous with his time, talents and resources is going to reap generously. One who is generous with love, appreciation and mercy will reap in the proportion that he sows those things.

The man who gives beyond his tithe (the tithe belongs to the Lord) has just begun to give. The more one gives, the more one reaps. But don't just look for repayment in monetary measure. Good health is more important than money. A family serving the Lord is more important than dollars.

3. We will always have a harvest (Malachi 3:10; Galatians 6:9).

When you sow, you will always reap! This law is as sure as the rising and going down of the sun. The success of this harvest is not determined by natural laws, but the success is governed by the Lord Himself. Should you sow your seed into your local place of worship from which you and your family receive much benefit? Of course! Will you reap the harvest? Certainly! You and your family reap a good harvest every time the pastor preaches the Word and sows good seed into your lives.

4. You will usually reap later than you sow.

You don't have to be around a farm too long to learn that both growth and decay take time. The same is true in our spiritual lives. Perhaps this is the reason Paul warned that we shouldn't be deceived.¹ There's a caution in sowing to the flesh. Nothing seems to happen right away. Marriages do not collapse in an instant. People become deceived and don't realize what's happening until they are trapped.

While we receive much immediate benefit when we sow into our local church, it doesn't stop there. We continue to reap the harvest throughout our lives, because the seed continues to multiply.

5. We will always reap more than we planted (Matthew 13:8).

When we plant a kernel of corn, we reap a stalk with several ears of corn on it. On the ears of corn are hundreds of kernels of corn. So it is with a blade of wheat. Only God could design such a wonder. The law of increased return is what makes farming a workable business enterprise. But sowing to the Spirit results in eternal life. The NIV translates I Corinthians 2:9, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."

6. There is a season for planting and a season for harvesting (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2).

Not all harvesting follows immediately. The time element is important. If the seed germinates before its proper time, a harvest can be lost. Many give as if there will not be a harvest. Some people think God has not noted what they are planting, simply because they have not experienced a harvest. But if we plant the seed, a harvest will come. For example, consider Proverbs 22:6 from the NIV: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." The promise is, if we continue to plant the

¹ **Galatians 6:7-10** – *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So the, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

seed of godly training when the child is young, then in a different season of life the child will not forget their training. Thus, as parents or grandparents, we enjoy the harvest, even though it might be years later.

7. Seed can be sown secretly; however, the harvest is always viewed by many.

We do not see all the work, sweat and tears that a person has expended to plant the seed. It may seem to those who were not involved in the labor that the seed was just planted yesterday. When we see the lives of people who are reaping a great harvest of blessing, we should remember that it sometimes took years of faithful cultivating and sowing to bring them to the place where they are today. The harvest they are now reaping, visible and apparent to all, required hours of sacrifice, pain, and toil when nobody else was watching.

8. We are responsible to sow and God is responsible for the harvest.

We are laborers together with God. God does not produce failures; He is the Lord of the harvest. With these laws God has set in order, we need to sow seed that is going to bring fruit both now and for eternity. He is the Lord of the harvest. As we enter each new season, we must start by planting.

The Practice of Extravagant Generosity

Part One

Foundational Scripture:

"You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity."
 --- 2 Corinthians 9:11

Introduction

People talk about putting God first and having God at the center of their lives, but in actual practice most of a person's major decisions are made without reference to God's will or priorities, and God is really peripheral instead of central. Instead of giving God the leftovers at the end of the month, tithing is a spiritual discipline that puts God first. It is a practical way of saying, God really is Lord of our lives, and we do not give into society's expectations, our possessions, or our appetites."

Tithing takes enormous trust in God. Tithing strengthens faith.

- Tithing forces us to think about the use of money and how all we receive has been entrusted to us by God. Tithing can cause us to spend money more wisely, with less waste and fewer superfluous or impulse purchases.
- Practicing the tithe can cause us to save more diligently and to consider the impact our investments have on society. Look at your money as if each dollar had a mission. As stewards, our job is to see that the money fulfills purposes consistent with our being followers of Christ. How we spend, how we save, and how we give should reflect this sense of mission.
- Tithing can cause us to rethink our borrowing and debt. Lowering credit card and auto debts can free substantial amounts for saving and giving. Take a look at your priorities, family spending habits and saving patterns, and the handling of debt. Commitment to the tithe will force significant discussions about your goals and values as a family that you would never have had otherwise.

- Tithing can intensify your already strong engagement with the church. You will become more keenly involved and interested in the well-being of the church than ever before. You would delight in the church's growth, the effectiveness of its ministries, and the outreach and mission. Tithing can seal and confirm your sense of belonging to the church.

First-century Christians discovered a truth as sure as gravity, that generosity enlarges the soul, realigns priorities, connects people to the Body of Christ, and strengthens congregations to fulfill Christ's ministries. Giving reflects the nature of God.

Growing in the grace of giving is part of the Christian journey of faith, a response Christian disciples offer to God's call to make a difference in the world.

- People who give generously to the church do so because they genuinely desire to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ and because they want to align their lives with higher purposes.
- They give in response to the Spirit's urging and feel a soul-sustaining satisfaction in the sense of meaning and connection that comes with generosity.
- They give because they love God, love the church, and desire to grow on love of neighbor.

Vibrant, fruitful, growing congregations practice Extravagant Generosity.

- These churches teach, preach, and practice proportional giving with a goal toward tithing.
- They encourage their church members to grow in the grace of giving as an essential practice of Christian discipleship, and as a congregation they practice generosity by their extraordinary support for missions and life-changing activities.
- They thrive with the joy of abundance rather than starve with a fear of scarcity.
- They give joyously, generously, and consistently in ways that enrich the souls of members and strengthen the ministries of the church.

As people grow in relationship to Christ, they grow also in the practice of Extravagant Generosity, offering more of themselves for the purposes of Christ and providing the resources that strengthen ministry and that help the church touch the lives of more and more people in the same way their own lives have been transformed by God.

What Does the Bible Say?

Scripture is replete with examples and teachings that focus on possessions, wealth, giving, gifts, generosity, offerings, charity, sacrifice, and sharing with those in need. Giving is central to Jewish and Christian practice because people perceive God as extravagantly generous, the giver of every good gift, the source of life and love. People give because they serve a giving God.

In the Old Testament, numerous passages underscore the significance of tithing (giving a tenth) and of first fruits (offering the first and best of the harvest, live stock, and income to the purposes of God).

In **Genesis 14:20**, Abram gave a tenth of everything to God, and throughout Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the practice of tithing and first fruits is evident.

The Book of Exodus says, *“Take from among you an offering to the Lord; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the Lord’s offering” (Exodus 35:5)*. Offering money and other possessions to God results from generosity of heart rather than from mere duty and obligation.

In Proverbs, people are reminded to *“Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce” (Proverbs 3:9)*. How people use their material resources either honors or dishonors their relationship to God. **Generosity aligns one’s life with God’s purposes.**

The prophet Malachi calls upon people to rely genuinely upon God by offering the tithe, implying that when people test God’s faithfulness, they find God’s presence and promises trustworthy (**Malachi 3:8-10**).

The voices of the prophets ring the warning that people cannot expect material sacrifices alone to please God but that God's reign requires justice, righteousness, and faithfulness (**Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:8**).

Jesus' teachings abound with tales of rich and poor, generous and shrewd, givers and takers, charitable and selfish, faithful and fearful. He commends the poor widow putting her two coins in the treasury; giving out of her poverty, she "*put in all she had to live on*" (**Luke 21:1-4**). The story upsets expectations by pointing to proportion rather than amount as the measure of extravagance.

In the story of the farmer who built bigger barns, placing his trust too much in earthly possessions, Jesus asks the spiritually probing question, *And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*" He warns, "*Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*" (**Luke 12:13-21**). Materialism does not foster life rich in God.

And Jesus recounts the parable of the three servants entrusted with varying talents to illustrate God's desire for the faithful to use what has been given to them responsibly and productively. The steward who fearfully hoards and buries his talent for safe-keeping is rebuked (**Matthew 25:14-30**). How people use what they have matters to God,

Jesus chastises the scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy, tithing while neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness. People of God are to practice justice and compassion without neglecting the tithe (**Matthew 23:23**). The tithe does not meet in full measure what the gift and demand of God's grace requires of Jesus' followers.

Jesus' unexpected love for Zacchaeus so radically changes the tax-collector that he gives his wealth to the poor and to those whom he has wronged. Giving serves justice and is a fruit of Christ's transforming grace (**Luke 19:1-10**).

Even the story of the Good Samaritan highlights extraordinary generosity. The Samaritan not only binds up the wounds of the stranger left to die on the side of the road, but he takes the stranger to an inn, pays for the stranger's care with his own money, and commits himself to provide for the long-term well-being of the stranger by telling the innkeeper, "*When I come back, I will repay whatever more you spend*" (**Luke 10:35**). The Samaritan's generosity, like Christ's compassion, knows no bounds.

Beyond all the teachings, parables, and stories, the followers of Jesus see in the gracious and costly gift of His sacrifice and death the ultimate self-revelation of God. The infinite nature of God's gracious love is revealed in the gift we have received in Christ. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son*" (**John 3:16**).

Paul describes generosity as one of the fruit of the Spirit, alongside love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5:22**). He describes how "*we have gifts that differ according to the grace given us,*" including *the giver, in generosity*" (**Romans 12:6-8**). All Christians practice generosity while some are particularly gifted by the Spirit to give in extraordinary measures.

Paul warns those with material means not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but rather on God, who richly provides everything. "*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life*" (**1 Timothy 6:18-19**).

In every Scripture mentioned --- giving is always *extravagant*, life changing, and joyous!

APPENDIX D

BULLETIN EDUCATION

THE STEWARDSHIP CORNER

The Faith Principle

Without Faith it is impossible to please God.

Hebrews 11:18

Giving is truly a reflection of our faith. Faith is an absolute necessity if we desire to give with a heart for God. If we are those who desire to please God, our giving should reflect those who truly trust in God. **Our Faith is made evident and is active in our lives when we exhibit actions which reveal our trust in God** to meet every need.

Whether it is in evangelizing and talking about the Goodness of the Lord in your life, making family decisions, getting involved in a ministry or making a financial commitment, **we must trust God! Before you place anything in the offering tray, make sure you have consulted God.** Then ask yourself, “How much would God have me give today?”

When you can answer, “**Whatever causes me to walk by faith,**” you have a desire to please God. Giving is not about a specific amount, “**for where your treasure is, your heart will be also. It is about pleasing God and a heart and mindset that reflects a faithful steward.**”

What is the disposition of your faith today? Do you trust God?

The Stewardship Corner
Giving in Abundance

Give, and it will be given to you...For with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. Luke 6:38

There is great Joy in giving! I know this doesn't sound exciting, but everything we use of our own resources to help someone else, always comes back to us multiplied. Try it! Try today giving, without expectation. Watch God provide for everything need and every circumstance. God will provide if we trust Him. If you've never tried trusting God in your finances, try God today by making a giving commitment in faith.

The principle of sowing and reaping applies, not just to our finances, but to every area of our lives. Whatever you give out in life, you're going to get back. If you give out love, you're going to get back love. **Whatever you give out you get back.**

1. **Thank God, that he has provided the means for your giving.**
2. **Trust God. Give your finances over to him today.**
3. **Try God by giving of your time, talent and resources. Then watch God give back.**

The Stewardship Corner
Abundantly Blessed

Deuteronomy 15:10 (NIV) Give generously to Him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

Giving freely expresses your worship and acknowledgement of God as the resource of every good and perfect gift. Our ability to freely give without expectation or worry is expresses our consecration and devotion to God. In the Old Testament it was a symbol of self-sacrifice and was given in proportion to the blessings of God. Have you ever considered that you are abundantly blessed? Even though we might not have everything we want, God does supply every need.

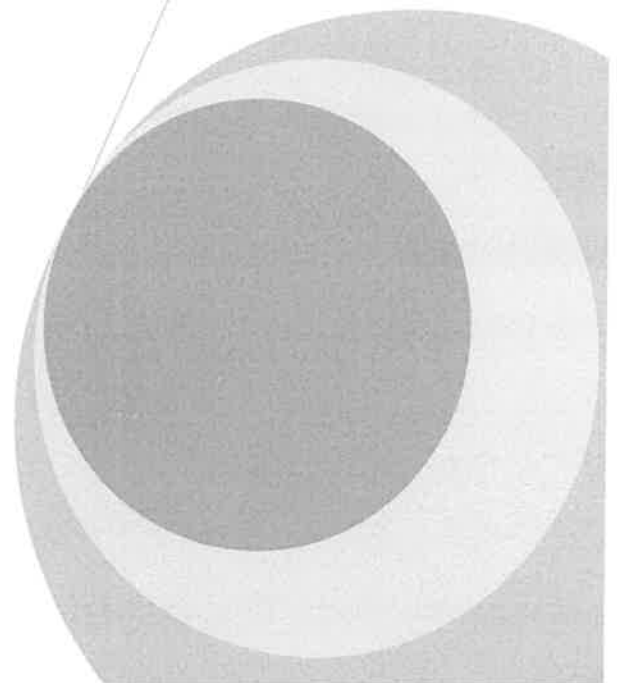
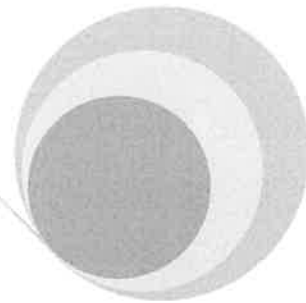
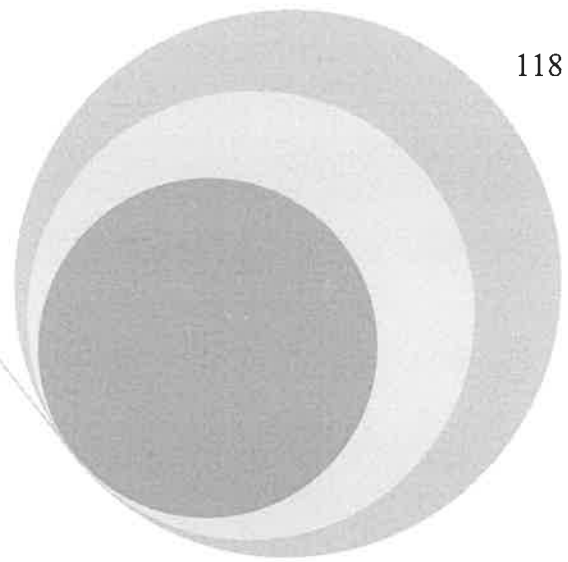
Reflect on our giving today:

1. Give in proportion to the blessings of God in your life.
2. Think about how abundantly blessed you are.
3. Give back to God as an act of worship, celebrating God's wonderful provision in your life.

I Am Abundantly Blessed!

APPENDIX E
SMALL GROUPS

First Baptist Small Group Leader Training



What is a Small Group?

- **Definition-** an intentional face-to-face gathering, varying in size (<12) and meeting regularly to accomplish an agreed-upon Christian purpose.

Small groups provide an environment for:

- **fellowship**
- **discipleship**
- **worship**
- **ministry**
- **evangelism**

TOPIC: Small Group Concept Tier

- **Small Group Leaders**
 - **Small Group Leaders will be responsible for a group of x or more members.**
- **Zone Leaders**
 - **Zone Leaders will be responsible for support, assistance and guidance of small group leaders.**
 - **emerge into District Leaders**
- **District Leaders**
 - **District Leaders who will be responsible for guiding and supporting Zone Leaders.**
- **Regional Leaders**
 - **Regional Leaders will care for and support the District Leaders.**
- **Area Leaders**
 - **Area Leaders will support Regional Leaders.**
- **Pastor**
 - **Rev. Derik led by the Senior Pastor**
- **Senior Pastor**
 - **Pastor Jones is being lead by God**
- **GOD**

TOPIC: Small Group Leader Job Description

- **Purpose:**
 - **A Small Group Leader is responsible for providing and facilitating small group sessions and for providing his/her group with shepherding, vision, direction and support consistent with First Baptist of South Richmond Church's mission and programs.**

TOPIC: Covenants

- Covenants are expressions of group values, expectations, or behaviors for which we hold ourselves mutually accountable.

TOPIC: Facilitation**I. TURN QUESTIONS INTO DISCUSSION**

- ❖ Self description ...Self disclosure
- ❖ Always be non-judgmental
- ❖ Mark special moments (“Hey that was really good!”)
- ❖ Keep it light (Laughter is the sign of positive group life!)

II. MAKE IT FOCUSED, MAKE IT PERSONAL

- ❖ Break the ice: use warm-up questions
- ❖ Shift from general to personal
- ❖ “Hold up the mirror” – (What’s the biblical expectation?)
- ❖ Good questions invite transformational discussions
- ❖ Spiritually sensitive – “Where is God at work...?”

III. MAKE IT INTERACTIVE, MAKE IT CREATIVE

- ❖ You’re not a “full pitcher” before “empty heads/souls”
- ❖ Create their desire to respond to one another, and not just to you
- ❖ “Control” the process – lightly
- ❖ Let your role gradually diminish/decrease
- ❖ Let their role gradually flourish/increase
- ❖ Relocate the center of power from the facilitator to the participants (from “the teacher” to the learners”)
- ❖ Put “it” in play! (basketball toss-up)

IV. MOVE FROM “MY STORY” TO GOD’S STORY

- ❖ What is what you’re going through teaching you about God?
- ❖ Don’t just leave people in their stories!
- ❖ Help them *connect* with God’s story!
- ❖ The power of God’s Spirit can become manifest

(Many moments of life together in small groups can become opportunities to reveal to each other the real presence of God in your midst.)

V. WE TEACH SOOOOOOOO LITTLE BECAUSE WE TEACH TOOOOOOOO MUCH!

- ❖ **LESS really is MORE!**
- ❖ **Break the subject down into “bite-sized” pieces/sections**
- ❖ **Don’t “over-feed”**
- ❖ **Don’t be information-driven**
- ❖ **Be people-driven**
- ❖ **Become sensitive to “how much is enough”**

VI. PRAY TOGETHER!

- ❖ **Model it, Keep it Safe and Guide the Prayer**
- ❖ **Specifically for one another**
- ❖ **For specific needs**
- ❖ **Prayer-pause: “Let’s take that into prayer.”**
- ❖ **Use silence when needed**

(Let them write down what they believe God has said to them.)

TOPIC: Small Group Session

- **Prepare for session**
 - **Decide on Icebreaker- Usually as part of Introduction(1 or 2)**
 - **Decide on Opening Prayer/Scripture**
 - **Gather Props/Visual Aids**
 - **Decide on Questions to facilitate during session**
 - **Decide on Closing Prayer**
- **During session**
 - **Introduction**
 - **Complete Rosters**
 - **Discuss session topic**
 - **Facilitate group questions into discussion.**
 - **Don’t load information unto group members.**
 - **Remember not to teach but to guide the discussion.**
 - **Remind group of vision and core values**
 - **Notice the concerns of group members.**
 - **Pray together, as needed.**
 - **Keep group focused on specific topic**
 - **Promote spiritual growth**

- **Understand the difference between support vs. counseling**
- **Encourage the group to grow**
- **Follow-up (Feedback)**

- **Closing session/After Session**

- **Have moments of reflection to the session**
- **Remind members of next meeting**
- **Ask members of special prayer request**
- **Pray for small group (special needs), Church family, community and nation.**
- **Complete Paperwork**
- **Prepare for next session**

Small Group Leader Training Attendance Sheet

Facilitators: Rev. Helen Edwards Email - hon5029@aol.com & Rev. Adreania McMillian Email- adreani7@aol.com	Time: 6:30pm-9:30pm
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Printed Name	Phone Number	Email Address
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First Baptist Church of South Richmond:
Small Group Meeting Report

Report Submission Date:

Type of Group (i.e. Recovery, Women, Men, etc.):

Group Leader:

Emerging Leader(s):

Meeting Date: **Start Time:** **End Time:**

Meeting Location:

Bible Study topic (include relevant book, if applicable and scripture):

Meeting Attendees (please list):

Additional comments, questions, or concerns:

Next Meeting Date:

Next Meeting

Location:

SMALL GROUP BULLETIN NOTICE

Calling all doorkeepers!

Calling all young adults!

Calling all those who like to sew!

Calling all those in recovery!

First Baptist of South Richmond is calling for you!

Would you like to spend time with persons who have similar concerns, similar interests, similar gifts and talents, if so a small group ministry is for you!

A small group ministry is a way that evangelism, discipleship, shepherding and service can take place. If you would like to care, nurture and help equip persons for ministry, become a small group leader today.

Contact Rev. Cheryl Ivey Green for more information at:

Church office - (804) 233-7679

E-Mail - cgreen@fbctoday.org.

Small Group Ministry Update

We currently have three small groups meeting at Hull Street during Breakfast hour on Sundays. There are two groups that have identified an emerging leader. If groups get too large, they will be able to birth another group.

We have one potential small group meeting at Ironbridge after Worship Service. The Small Group Leader meets when there are attendees. There have not been any attendees on a regular basis. 1 person (New Member) showed up for a session this past Sunday.

Suggestions to enhance Small Group Ministry:

Constantly advertise Small Groups (bulletin, pulpit announcements, and information desks at events).

Thank those individuals (5) who are doing well with their small groups; especially for the Spring Session (We are looking to give them a Certificate of Appreciation)

Have a special small group ***Session*** in August (1 Sunday at Hull Street location & 1 Sunday at Ironbridge), where we will have 10 small groups (discussing different topics). We will invite those to attend and receive free breakfast (Hull Street) and Continental breakfast (Ironbridge). The goal of this event is to promote small groups and perhaps a small group will be birth from the event.

Plan to have one more training session before Fall Session starts. Allow Small Group Sessions to occur during the week and other locations outside of church.

Start introducing the small group concept to new members or those who recently completed New Members orientation. Suggest putting New Members into groups once they have completed New Members over orientation.

Encourage group members to invite others (including non- members of FB to small group session -- evangelism)

Letter will be written, to be sent out to members on behalf of Sr. Pastor and Pastor Jones to encourage those to participate in Small Groups and explaining the concept.

Recommend having each ministry of the church start their meetings using the Small Group format (Prayer, Icebreaker, Bible Study, and Business). This will require a meeting with all ministry leads.

Small Group Ministry Update

Select and meet with Small Group Administrative Team starting in July.

Add small group information to Church Website.

Develop surveys to see the need of the congregation and develop small groups.

Have Pastors visit briefly small group sessions (encouragement).

****Sponsor “Get Involved” Day** where each ministry is represented (at table) and promote their ministry. *This way the congregation will know what ministries are available in the church. Individuals can sign-up that day to be a member of a particular ministry. This event may be very helpful at Ironbridge location to get those who just come out to Worship Service involved in doing ministry.*

Small Group Ministry Meeting Sign-In Sheet

[illegible]

Small Group Ministry Meeting Sign-In Sheet

Looking Within



“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life— and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.” (Romans 12:2, THE MESSAGE)

Threads of grace interlace our everyday experiences. Each day the holy intertwines with the mundane, our common lives are touched by the new creation offered us in Christ. Focused on work, family, routine, health, worry, finances, necessity, and constant activity, and distracted by the blur and sound of television, video, Internet, podcasts, MP3s, radio, and commercial culture, we easily overlook the movement of spirit and the stirrings of grace. Living in fast-forward, we neglect the interior life and the spiritual journey and misperceive the signs of God’s presence. Intimations of God’s love go unnoticed and God’s activity, undetected.

The Balancing Act: A Daily Rediscovery of Grace by Robert Schnase sharpens our perception. The stories cause us to look afresh at our living-breathing-working-playing-loving-crying-laughing-life for the striking of God’s grace, the Spirit’s interruption, and the unexpected traces of God’s love. It helps us reexamine our own faith journeys through the perspective of a different topic taken from everyday life experiences. These stories invite us to notice God, and the people God places before us, with greater attentiveness and receptivity. Bridging the chasm between what we believe and what we do requires the hard work of daily reflection and the intentional rediscovery of grace in every day.

Jesus noticed seeds spilled on pathways, birds making nests, money tables in temples, figs on trees, flour baskets brimming over, leftover bread, and branches on vines. Jesus was captivated by beauty, irony, simplicity, the curious and the interesting details around him. He noticed a woman drawing water, a widow at the treasury, a tax collector’s prayer, a Pharisee’s showy robe, a beggar at the gate, an exasperated judge, a sister distracted by too many things, a thief suffering alongside him. He used experiences to show us glimpses of God in daily living and wove these experiences into stories and parables to show us God’s kingdom. By his habit of intertwining the spiritual with the mundane, the Spirit became flesh dwelling among us. Threads of grace stream through each day connecting us to God and to one another.

Week 1 –Balancing Act

Jesus said, “Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me-watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.” (Matthew 11:28-20, THE MESSAGE)

Opening Prayer:

Icebreaker: Select icebreaker after reading this week’s session.

(Show the picture on page 5, of the tightrope walker) Ask Group: **What feelings or thoughts come to mind (i.e. anxiety, scared) when you see the picture of the tightrope walker?**

We all wish we could live a totally balanced life-the perfect mix of family, personal, work, play, spiritual sustenance, reading, productivity, and health. If we could just get it right, then everything would work out well, and we’d live happily and fruitfully without much effort. But rather than having a totally balanced life, the best we can do is to commit ourselves to the hard work of balancing. Of constantly noticing and adjusting to keep from leaning too far one way or the other and falling into disaster.

The phrase “the balancing act” is a metaphor derived from the actual circus performances of days gone by. Remember the tightrope walker? She steps out onto a wire line stretched tightly high above the ground between two tall posts while carrying a long, horizontal pole. Inch by inch tightrope artist gracefully moves across the wire. But whether she dances, walks, or stands still, there’s always constant movements represent the inevitable pull of gravity to one side and then the other, and of her constantly offsetting these forces with tiny corrections and adjustments. The long, horizontal balancing pole totters slightly, rising a little on one side while falling a little on the other, and it does so from the first step until last. In short, the tightrope walker with her excellent sense of balance is never completely balanced; she is always balancing.

Question: What are two or three of the competing pressures, priorities, or desires that come to mind for you when you think about “the balancing act”?

There is a difference between a balanced life and balancing life. This difference may seem subtle, but is really quite significant. We are never the perfect weight; we never find the perfect mix of work and play; and we never managed to feed all our physical, emotional, and spiritual hungers with the exact portions necessary while also sustaining those around us and meeting all our professional and community obligations. We never find the ideal pattern that needs no reconsideration, recalibration, or rebalancing. Life is constant movement, forward stepping, sidetracking, detouring, self-correcting, getting a little lost, and finding our way back with the help of friends.

Question: What practices or activities, friends and confidants, bring you back to yourself and restore a sense of proper proportion?

Balancing life's tasks, challenges, and callings is spiritual work, a matter of will, effort, prayer, decision, priority, change, growth, risk, grace, more grace, and reliance upon God and upon friends. Balancing all the stuff around us begins with balancing what's inside us. In our interior life, our life with God, we map the course, get the priorities right, open ourselves to the promptings of spirit, and remember who we are. Balancing is hard, but it's worth the effort. It keeps us from falling. It makes it possible to step forward without so much tension and worry. With practice, we may even begin to carry ourselves as gracefully forward as the woman on the wire does, even if we teeter and totter a little here and there.

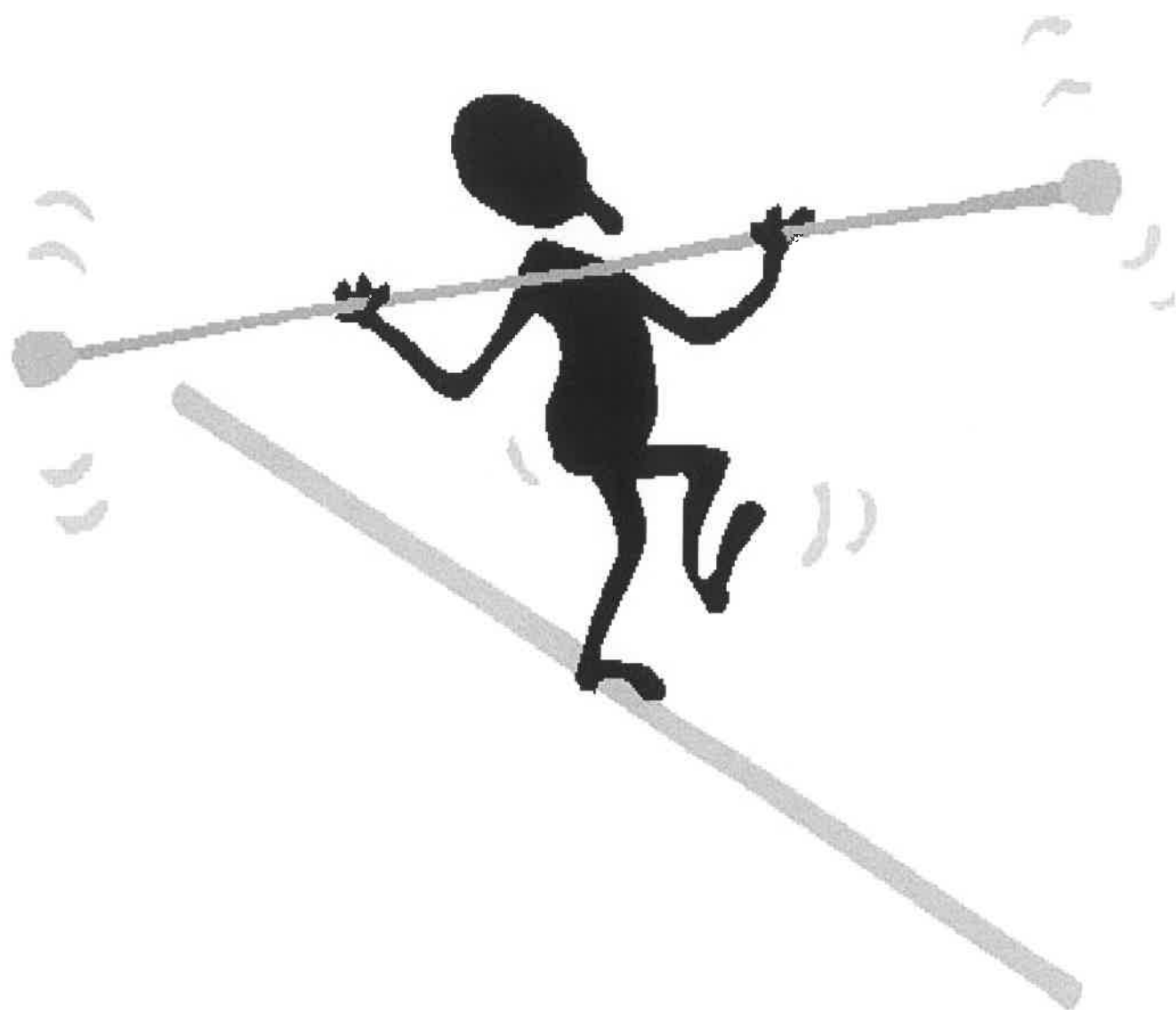
Question: Was there a time when things fell badly out of balance, and what helped you back?

Jesus' teachings are full of action words and heavy-loaded with imperatives: "Go... Teach... Heal... Baptize... Take up... Arise of personal prayer, extended rest, time away, dinners with friends, long walks, fishing trips, stopovers at water wells, time in the Temple, Sabbath. If Jesus' life required constant balancing, what makes us think we can work ours out with complete and un-improvable success?

How are you doing with your balancing act? What will you be like if all the patterns now so evident in your daily life continue uninterrupted into future? Will you and I see fewer birds this year than last? Or will we notice more?

Prayer: God, help me to follow you without falling; and when I fall, help me take the hand you offer. Amen.

Devotional Scriptures: *Psalm 16:5-11; Psalm 37:5-7; Jeremiah 6: 16; Matthew 11:28-30, Mark 4:35-41 &*



Week 2 –Labyrinth (Maze)

Thomas said to him, "How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 14:5-6)

Optional Activity: Leaders may copy the maze of the angel on page 7 for each group member to be completed as an optional fun activity.

Opening Prayer:

Icebreaker: Who has been the most instrumental on your faith journey and why?

As children we have often found a way through a game of maze, but there are labyrinths (maze) in our lives. There have been some big turns and some little turns in the maze. Some turns have lead to other turns, while some turns have ended in dead ends. Some paths lead us to the "holy ground", while others left us wanting to see more of God's awesome power. Each move along the path has presented different choices that essentially helped form who we are today.

Question: What three "big turns" have you made that have brought you to who you are? How do you integrate those turning point events you regret into your story alongside those who you celebrate?

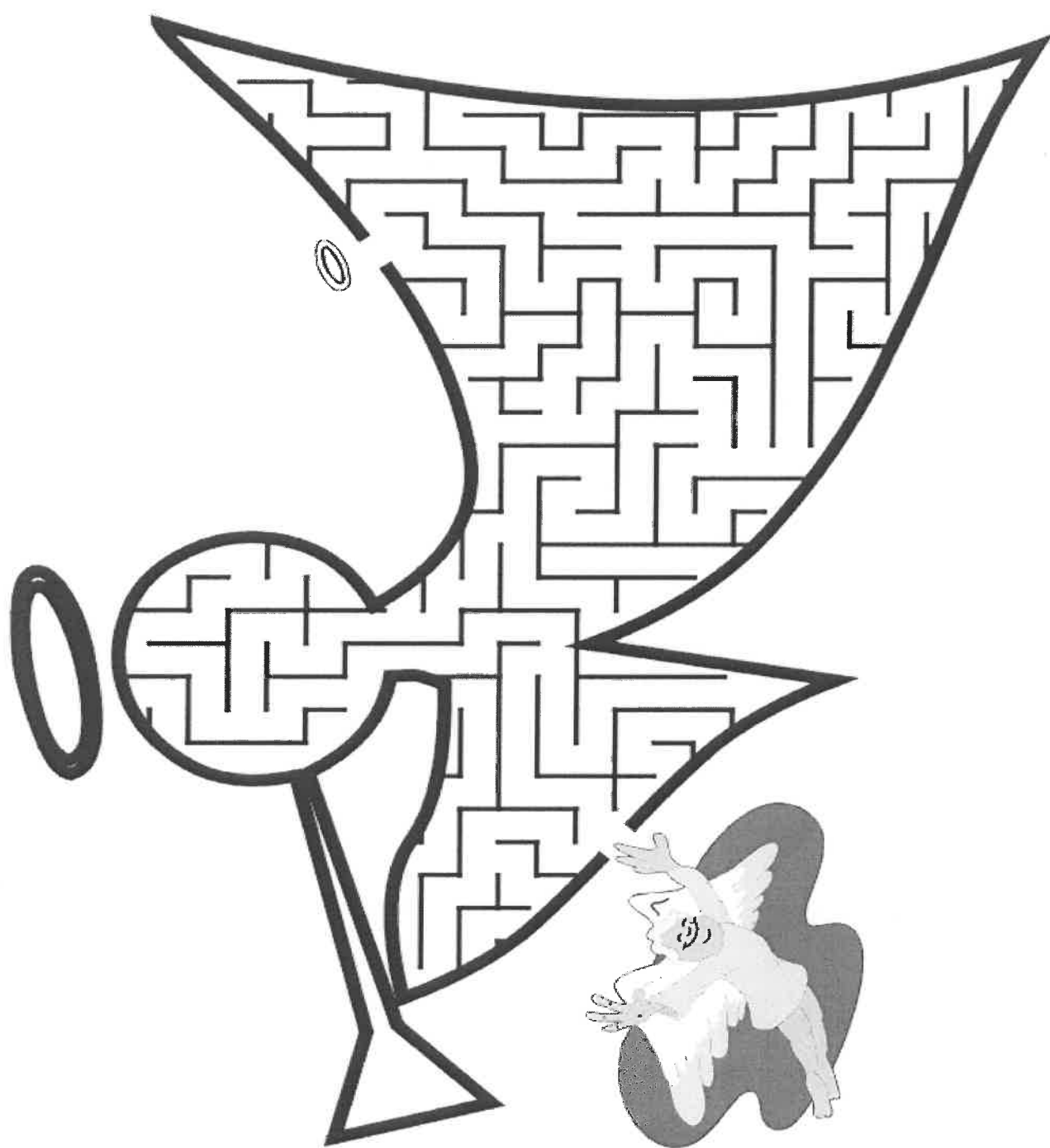
How could any of us get from Point A to Point B without the help of a thousand friends and strangers? God calls us through people, teaches us through people, leads us and sustains us through people. The most concrete and personal way God reaches down into our lives to work for our behalf is through people.

Question: Who have been the people most instrumental in forming who you are today? How do you give the person who was most instrumental in journey thanks, and give God thanks for them?

Sometimes God uses the most ordinary means to take us to the most extraordinary places of life. Can you think of extraordinary place you have been, but yet God allowed it? This extraordinary place is where you saw the hand of God working in your life. These paths our lives have taken should be a reminder of all the unique pathways by which people come to the one who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." God will use whoever and whatever he wishes to get us where he wants us to be in life. We must keep the faith and continue to move forward on this path and not get stagnant on the journey.

Prayer: Lord, help me accept the unchangeable past as a grace and to make of it a stepping stone toward a future full of life and hope. Amen.

Devotional Scriptures: *Psalm 77:11; Isaiah 26:3; Isaiah 42:16; Isaiah 43:18-19; Jeremiah 6:16.*



Week 3 –What does it mean?

*“Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ ...Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’”
(John 3:3, 9)*

Opening Prayer:

Icebreaker: Leaders select icebreaker for small group after reading this week’s session.

Sometimes in our lives and in our churches we are faced with unexpected events. We are often looking at the event and asking the question, “What does it mean?” “What is the purpose for that happening?” What does this event mean for how we fulfill our purpose in life or our mission as a church?

Unexpected events can happen in church- a tragic fire, unexpected large donation, changes in neighborhood, a new zoning ordinance, a tragic event, arrival of new families. How a church responds while keeping a focus on its mission is critical.

Same is true in our personal lives. A devastating grief, an unanticipated layoff, an unplanned pregnancy, a windfall inheritance, a new twist in a relationship-any of these can become the occasion for looking back, blaming, overanalyzing, second-guessing, getting stuck. Or such events can mean opening to a new chapter for ourselves, the most important decision is always the next one. And there is always a next one.

Question: When did an unexpected event cause you to explore afresh your spiritual journey?

When the unexpected, unusual, and unplanned happens we cannot be bogged down only in the causes and reasons. There is also the spiritual question, “What does it mean? What does it mean for me, for us, for our community, for the life God has called me to and for the tasks God has entrusted to us?”

Question: “The most important decision is always the next one.” What does that mean for you? How does this free you from the past and point you to the future?

Prayer: Lord, open us to the unexpected, to the new birth you intended for us, and to the new paths we have not planned, but which nevertheless lead us to you.

Devotional Scriptures: *Proverbs 3:5-6; James 4:13-15; Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 20:4-5; Psalm 138:8.*

Week 4 –Lost Coins

“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:8)

Opening Prayer:

Icebreaker: Select an icebreaker after reading this week’s session.

Have you ever been walking along the sidewalk and found money on the pavement? In today’s society it is rare to find large sum of money on the street, but you may still be able to find a dirty penny. When you find the lost coin do you take it home and put into your “jar of pennies” or do you ignore it and keep walking.

No preacher can talk about finding lost coins without somehow returning to the stories of Jesus about lost things. In the fifteenth chapter of Luke, Jesus answers the religious “insiders” who are grumbling about his spending too much time with the “outsiders” by telling them three stories-about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. How does a sheep get lost? It nibbles its way lost; through distraction, ignorance, naiveté’, and simply following its own appetites without seeing the “big picture implications,” the sheep ends up wandering away from the flock. How does the son get lost? Willful rebellion against his father-basically wishing his dad were dead so he could get all his dad’s worldly possessions and do his own thing.

How does the coin get lost? It neither wanders nor rebels. It gets lost, *becomes* lost, and is lost by *someone* else. No matter how you cut it, the *lost state* of the coin is described by a passive verb construction. Someone loses it. Carelessness? Distraction? Apathy? Anger? Negligence? Accident? We don’t know. But these attributes describe the person who loses it, not the coin itself.

Our congregations fulfill their mission in a sea of lost people, within and beyond our walls. There are so many ways we find ourselves cut off from God, for each other, from our families, from our community, from our own best selves, from what God created us to be. We nibble ourselves lost, and we willfully rebel. The story of the ages is repeated in each of us. But think about the people who aren’t lost because of their own volition, but because we sight of them. Like throwaway coins on the side of the road, we drop them, lose them, and let them slip through the cracks and out of view and out of mind. They aren’t valuable enough for us to make the effort to find them.

Question: Think about people you are at risk of losing touch with- relatives, neighbors, coworkers, church members. What restrains you from reaching out to them or taking initiative to renew relationships?

Who are we losing sight of in our churches? Older adults, people going through divorce who slip into inactivity, single moms who don’t feel at home among us, families with children with special needs. And in our communities? People get lost in our healthcare system, our educational systems, and our economic and political systems.

Even our relatives become strangers to us. They disappear from our view right in our own everyday paths!

Question: When have you felt “lost,” and who helped bring you back?

How did Jesus come up with this story of the lost coin? Surely people lost as many coins from their pockets and leather pouches in biblical times as we lose from our wallets and purses today. Imagine that through his many miles of walking, Jesus must have occasionally reached down to pick up a lost coin and smile with his companions. Maybe he even kept a jar of lost coins himself, reminders of all the lost people he gathered around him to become his followers to transform the world he came to save. Maybe with each lost person he found, he said to himself, “That makes it all worthwhile!”

Prayer: Lord, starting today with one person, make me an instrument of your reconciling love. What I intend with my heart may I follow with my actions.

Devotional Scriptures: *Psalm 25:16; Psalm 68:5-6; Deuteronomy 31:6; John 15:4; Hebrews 15:5.*

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